ISSUE 172 | NOVEMBER 2009

DUNGEON®

A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® ROLEPLAYING GAME SUPPLEMENT

ISSUE NO. 172

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DUNGEON®

DUNGEON

172

DUNGEON November 2009

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Gator Man

Have you ever been to a carnival that has kiddie rides? One of the more popular rides for young kids is the mini-coaster. It consists of several cars, usually decorated to look like a dragon or an alligator. It rolls around on a metal track with gentle ups and downs—a placid, oval journey. It's many a kid's first thrill ride without the comforting presence of mom sitting alongside. This is as tame as amusement park rides get, and running The Gator has to be about the most boring duty a carny can pull.

One July 4 weekend, as my family and I strolled through the midway at a local carnival, The Gator caught my eye. It wasn't the ride; that was the same as always. It was the operator.

Here was a guy, probably in his mid-50s, dressed in scuffed cowboy boots, stiff blue jeans that were a bit too tight, a growing paunch restrained by a belt with a huge silver buckle, and a denim shirt with pearl snaps and the sleeves rolled up to show his USMC tattoos and knock-off Rolex. A pack of thin cigars was tucked in his shirt pocket. His skin was so leathery that he looked like he might be half gator himself. His face was mostly hidden behind mirrored shades, a handlebar moustache, and a straw cowboy hat with the brim rolled up on the sides and broken down so sharply in front that it practically brushed the tip of his nose. And he was chewing a matchstick.

You could find a more intimidating figure to park in front of a carnival ride for three-year-olds, but not without some effort.

What really grabbed my attention about this scene, however, was the sign taped to the ride. It was scrawled in black marker on a piece of corrugated cardboard, and read:

GATOR MAN NEEDS A WOMAN!
35-45
Willing to travel
Must cook

What does this have to do with D&D? Much of what brings a game to life is NPCs. Battles can be exciting and memorable, but they're not where the characters live. You *have* a battle; you *interact with* NPCs. They are the most direct expression of the world that characters will meet, and the more varied and colorful they are, the more the world breathes. If your characters stroll though a carnival, you could describe the sights and sounds around them or you could describe Gator Man and let the characters talk to him. The conversation will make a deeper impression.

What might Gator Man look like in a D&D setting? Consider his essential characteristics. Gator Man didn't look like just any cowboy; he looked like *the* cowboy. He went out of his way to make himself look grizzled and fierce for his job of working with young children. Your NPC could be an old warrior, retired from adventuring but still tough as nails; his ornate sword hangs in a patched, cracked scabbard and the battered hat of an officer in the Dragon Cavalry is crushed around his skull as if it grew there. Is it true that he saved the Duke's life but then was dismissed in disgrace? Why does he call himself the Gorgon Man, and how did he wind up running the town's orphanage?

Answer those questions and you'll get a unique NPC who the characters will remember whether they encounter him once or a dozen times.

The good news for DMs is that varied, colorful people are all around. You can't miss them if you keep your eyes open. They might not all be as distinctive as Gator Man, but he was one-of-a-kind.

What are your stories of NPCs that break the mold? Do you know any real-life characters who would make unforgettable NPCs? Let us know about them at dndinsider @wizards.com.

Steve

SCALES OF WAR

Legacy of Io

By Daniel Marthaler

An adventure for 24th-level characters

illustrations by William O'Connor

cartography by Mike Schley

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"And thus it was that the proud god Io, forefather of dragons, went forth alone to meet that formidable primordial known as the King of Terror. The confrontation raged fierce between the divine and the base for long days as grievous wounds were wrought by both upon the form of the other. It continued in such ferocity unabated until the vile King of Terror took up his crude axe and dealt to noble Io a fearsome blow that shattered his divine form, hewing the valiant god in twain. The vicious primordial's triumph was not to be, for no sooner had Io's sundered remains fallen to earth than they rose up to assail the beast as the twin gods Tiamat and Bahamut. Their sudden assault saw the King of Terror torn asunder in a righteous fury, yet in their triumph, the victorious deities fell upon each other. Two imperfect forms for a single essence, the pair are ever drawn together, locked in eternal hatred as that which they are seeks unachievable consolidation."

"Legacy of Io" is an adventure for five 24th-level characters. By the end of the adventure, the PCs should be midway through 25th level. This adventure follows "Grasp of the Mantled Citadel" in the Scales of War adventure path but can be adapted for use in any campaign.

In "Legacy of Io," the characters seek out and recover an ominous artifact they hope will assist them in their struggle against the forces of the dark goddess Tiamat. Unlikely alliances are forged and the heroes find themselves in violent conflict with the good-aligned forces of the heavenly city of Hestavar as they storm through the peaceful planar metropolis in search of what might be the only way to thwart the seemingly unstoppable machinations of the Dragon Queen.

Background

In the previous installment of the adventure path ("Grasp of the Mantled Citadel"), Tiamat's sinister and far-reaching plans bore dark fruit as she summoned Bahamut in mortal form and destroyed him. He may have fallen, but Bahamut has one last gambit in play: the deva paladin Amyria has begun experiencing visions that depict the *Arrow of Fate*, an ancient and powerful artifact that dates from the Dawn War at creation's beginning that could be the undoing of Tiamat's schemes.

When the primordial known as the King of Terror cut down the original dragon-god Io, the fallen god's sundered remains rose up as the deities Tiamat and Bahamut. A shard of Io's form had been torn off during the titanic battle and remained separate from the newly birthed gods, becoming what is now known as the *Arrow of Fate*. The divine fragment-turned-artifact retains the furor of the Dawn War that raged during its creation and is a potent weapon against both the divine and primordial. Infused with the colossal energies released at the destruction of Io and birth of his successor gods, the relic is capable of exerting influence over the forces of life and death.

This immensely powerful object was eventually sequestered by servants of Pelor, Erathis, and Ioun, for the trio of gods had plans for the artifact. As part of an unusual bargain with Asmodeus, the deities undertook a great ritual to lock away the artifact with four great seals.

Adventure Synopsis

Amyria, driven by the visions that began shortly after Bahamut's destruction, approaches the PCs and begs their assistance in recovering the artifact. At her urging, they travel to the astral city of Hestavar to seek out whatever knowledge of the artifact's location they can discover. Upon arriving in the domain, however, the characters come under attack by draconic forces seemingly loyal to Bahamut.

After fending off the assault, the heroes make their way to the great libraries of the Swan Tower, home to the goddess of knowledge, Ioun. At possibly the greatest collection of divine lore and scholarship that exists, they search for information on the bizarre visions tormenting Amyria. They discover that the artifact they seek is known as the *Arrow of Fate* and that it is hidden within Hestavar. Four mystical seals conceal the artifact; each is guarded in turn by forces loyal to the gods and dedicated to preventing anyone and anything from tampering with their ward.

The PCs have several options. The fourth and final seal is inaccessible until the first three are destroyed, but the first three can be tackled in any order. Regardless of the sequence, the characters need to open all four to gain access to the *Arrow*. Once they destroy the first, they come to the attention of the Bright Guard, a company of exalted responsible for policing Hestavar. The Bright Guard combs the streets for the characters, forcing them to move carefully or attract unwanted attention.

To open the seal dedicated to Pelor, the heroes must fight their way through the angelic guardians of the Dawnbell Bastion to sunder the bell in which the seal has been bound and that gives the small fortification its name. The selfless defenders are unaware of the nature of the bell (and would not be moved even if they knew), and they resist violently any attempts to trespass or tamper with the rightful property of their master.

When the PCs make their way onto Methion, the mercantile district where Erathis's seal is located, they are ambushed by a band of celestial dragonkin, this time augmented by forces from the Nine Hells. After dealing with the seemingly random attack, the characters head to the spacious market square where the goddess placed her seal. Before destroying it, the heroes must overcome Erathis's faithful who patrol the square and the guardians summoned by the disturbance of the seal itself.

Before the PCs can neutralize the seal dedicated to Ioun, they are forced to scour the city for the entrance to its hidden resting place. Once they gain entry to the Sealed Library, they must fight their way through the scholarly defenders and undo the seal.

The Quests

In "Legacy of Io," the characters must identify and recover the *Arrow of Fate*. As the adventure progresses, they have the following chances to earn quest XP.

Minor Quest—Identify the Artifact
The vast libraries and knowledgeable sages of the Swan Tower offer the best chance of uncovering the identity of the mysterious artifact and its history. This information is crucial to determining the PCs' course of action and understanding the task at hand.

Reward: 5,000 XP.

Minor Quest—Sunder the Dawnbell
Pelor bound one of the four seals into the form of a bell wrought from silver and gold. Destroying it opens the seal and must be done if the characters hope to reclaim the *Arrow*.

Reward: 6,000 XP.

Minor Quest—Destroy the Seal of Methion
Erathis worked her seal into the great market square of Methion. Without its destruction, the *Arrow* will remain hidden.

Reward: 6,000 XP.

Minor Quest—Open Ioun's Seal
Ioun hid her seal where few could find it. The heroes must uncover its location and open the seal.

Reward: 6,000 XP.

Major Quest—Secure the Arrow
Overcoming the enraged titan that guards the final seal reveals the *Arrow of Fate*, but the PCs must still survive Guionne's betrayal and escape the city with the *Arrow* if it is to be of any use against Tiamat.

Reward: 35,000 XP.

To open the final seal and claim the *Arrow of Fate*, the characters must head into the eye of the storm that rages over the rough and tumble island district know as the Salts. There they face not another servant of the gods but a powerful titan. With its destruction, the final seal is undone and the *Arrow* is revealed. Unfortunately for the heroes, the titan's passing also removes the force holding the churning sea at bay and it comes crashing back to fill the void. When the PCs are washed ashore, they find themselves betrayed by an ally and forced into a desperate battle to retain possession of the prize on which so much depends.

Preparing for Adventure

"Legacy of Io" gives the characters an opportunity to gain a powerful artifact that might be able to hold back the seemingly unstoppable advances of Tiamat and perhaps even strike back at her. The heroes make their way to the domain that epitomizes civilization and justice only to find themselves in conflict with the heavenly denizens and working with devils. The will of three gods must be overthrown if the PCs hope to thwart that of another.

The adventure can begin as soon as the characters complete their previous adventure. Go to "Trouble Sleeping" (page 7) when you are ready to begin.

What You Need to Play

Everything you need to run the adventure, including background information, setup, tactical encounters, and maps, is contained within these pages. More detailed information on how to use the tactical encounter format can be found in previous Scales of War adventures, such as "A Tyranny of Souls," while *Manual of the Planes*™ and "Hestavar: the Bright City" from *Dragon #371* can provide such information on the domain and city of Hestavar.

Treasure Preparation

"Legacy of Io" employs the treasure parcel system as described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*®. A total of fifteen treasure parcels are available to the heroes over the course of the adventure. The following sidebar lists the most likely encounters to have parcels and what each parcel might contain. The magic items should be taken from your players' wish lists. The parcels can be awarded in whatever order you see fit, but the higher level items are best used later in the adventure.

Treasure

Parcel A: _____, H1. A Warm Welcome
Parcel B: _____, D3. For Whom the Bell Tolls
Parcel C: _____, D3. For Whom the Bell Tolls
Parcel D: _____, D3. For Whom the Bell Tolls
Parcel E: _____, M1. Back Alley Ambush
Parcel F: _____, M3. Last Ditch Defense
Parcel G: _____, M3. Last Ditch Defense
Parcel H: _____, L1. Angry Librarians
Parcel I: _____, L1. Angry Librarians
Parcel J: _____, L2. Headmaster's Charge
Parcel K: _____, L2. Headmaster's Charge
Parcel L: Parcel 15, S1. Raging Storm
Parcel M: _____, S2. Guionne's Betrayal
Parcel N: _____, S2. Guionne's Betrayal
Parcel O: _____, S2. Guionne's Betrayal

Based on the guidelines in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, the following parcels can go in spaces above. Magic items should be selected from your players' wish lists.

Parcel 1: Magic item, level 28
Parcel 2: Magic item, level 27
Parcel 3: Magic item, level 27
Parcel 4: Magic item, level 26
Parcel 5: Magic item, level 25
Parcel 6: 1,000 pp, one *potion of recovery*, 5 ad
Parcel 7: six clear diamonds that glow with inner light (15,000 gp each)
Parcel 8: 750 pp, mithral and celestial gold statuette of Pelor inlaid with condensed astral fire (100,000 gp)
Parcel 9: 20 ad, one *potion of recovery*, 5 *tempest whetstones* (level 20, *Adventurer's Vault*, page 190)
Parcel 10: 120 pp, one *potion of recovery*, 2 *potions of resistance* (level 24, *Adventurer's Vault*, page 188)
Parcel 11: celestial oak and baatorian hardwood puzzle box inlaid with mithral (50,000 gp) containing 200,000 gp worth of residuum, gold and black enameled astrolabe adorned with points of elemental lightning, fire, and ice (50,000 gp)
Parcel 12: 460 pp, ritual scroll of Planar Portal and Plane Shift
Parcel 13: devil skin pouch holding 20 ad
Parcel 14: 250 pp, a pair of mithral and black glass bracelets chased with shifting fire (50,000 gp each), platinum ring set with astral diamonds and frozen lightning (50,000 gp), one *potion of life*
Parcel 15: The *Arrow of Fate* (see page 26)

Trouble Sleeping

Once the PCs have had a chance to recuperate from their last adventure, Amyria approaches them. It is obvious that something is bothering the deva a great deal: her gray skin is drawn and has taken on a sickly cast, her eyes are feverish, and her normally distinct white markings seem faded, almost clouded over. She avoids answering questions about her health or reason for seeking the characters out until they are in private, at which point she holds up her hands to forestall further questions.

"I understand that this is somewhat out of the ordinary, but I have need to speak to you without the others in the Coalition overhearing.

"I .. have not been well. The others believe that my grief over Bahamut's passing and the progress of the war are responsible. I have done nothing to dissuade them of their ideas, but they are incorrect. Since the fall of the Platinum Dragon, my dreams have been wracked by increasingly vivid visions. Each night I see myself pierced through with an arrow of bone wrapped with sinew and flesh and adorned with burning runes. Silver-chased blood spreads from my wounds and runs from the head of the arrow. The power of these visions is frightening and ancient beyond explanation, but I cannot describe them as evil or malicious.

"With every fiber of my being I know these visions to be a gift, a last gift from Bahamut to his beleaguered children. The artifact from the visions is the key; it must somehow be able to foil Tiamat's foul schemes. I have asked much of you before, but I cannot approach the Coalition with this. I beg of you to search out the identity of and recover this fateful artifact, without which I fear we will all be lost."

If the heroes press her with questions, she explains that this is all she knows, but she is certain of what she has revealed. Amyria is visibly relieved if the PCs agree to the search and enjoins them, for reasons she cannot quite articulate, to begin their search in the fabled libraries of the Swan Tower within the astral domain of Hestavar. She offers to arrange transport to the domain if the characters wish, explaining that she knows an astral skiff captain by the name Jin'har who would be willing to make a short detour and discretely drop off the heroes at the edge of the domain as repayment for a past favor.

PCs trained in Arcana or Religion know that the astral domain and metropolis of Hestavar is the home to Erathis, Ioun, and Pelor and is widely considered to be the ideal of just civilization. A DC 25 check with either skill reveals that the Swan Tower is the seat of Ioun and perhaps the most prestigious center of learning that exists.

Should the characters attempt to use rituals to ferret out information regarding the mysterious artifact, their efforts yield only silence. It seems that something powerful is obscuring the artifact and blocking divination attempts. If the heroes mention this to Amyria, she is unperturbed and utterly certain that the answers will reveal themselves when the time is right.

Part One: The Bright City

Whether the PCs accept Amyria's offer of transport or arrange to reach Hestavar on their own, this adventure assumes they arrive with little trouble and less excitement. If the characters haven't quite reached 24th level, the journey through the astral sea could be fraught with however much danger is necessary to get them caught up.

At the end of the trip, the heroes are deposited upon a pristine white sand bank that winds its way through a peaceful lagoon sparkling in the sunlight. Beyond the beach are open, airy buildings carved from white marble and roofed with gold. Elegant ships ply the lagoon and glide through the sky, darting about within the cloud of earthmotes that rises ever higher. Manicured cobblestone streets and breathtaking buildings of every imaginable architectural style crown these floating neighborhoods. Hestavar, the Bright City, lies before them.

The Sand Bar

The sun-warmed sand winds toward the city ahead, the way sprinkled with rocky outcroppings and small pools. Tiny waves lap at the edges of the bar, contributing to the peaceful, calming ambiance.

After encounter H1, the PCs are left with troubling questions but no answers. The attacking forces were clearly the servants of a draconic deity but seem to have been from the celestial hosts of the late Bahamut. Equally as disturbing and inexplicable is the fact that the attackers seemed to know where the characters would be. Whatever the answers to these riddles, the ambushers left few traces and fewer clues. If the heroes tarry overlong, a flight of twelve Angels of Light led by an Angel of Command (see encounter D1) arrive to investigate. Unless the PCs do something rash, such as attacking the angels, they find little evidence and offer to escort the newcomers the remainder of the way to the city.

Tactical Encounter: H1. A Warm Welcome (page 14).

Hestavar

The remainder of the sojourn in the city is uneventful. White sand gives way to sculpted marble and manicured cobblestone as the characters make their way into the city proper. The vast majority of the city lies above them on the many earthmotes that rise to the heavens. Even at ground level, the bustle of an active, thriving metropolis envelops the characters. The open, airy streets, lined with beautiful homes and businesses of all descriptions, are thronged with exalted going about their business and troops of angels going about their gods' business. Despite all the activity, there remains a sense of peace and contentment that no mortal city could duplicate.

Getting anywhere in a massive, bustling city built on hundreds of independent and sometimes mobile floating chunks of rock is a daunting task for outsiders. Fortunately for the heroes, the natives of Hestavar take great pride in their ability to navigate the confusing three-dimensional maze and are more than willing to give aid to lost travelers. The complex nature of the

Hestavar

Hestavar, the Bright City, is the pinnacle of civilization: art, innovation, trade, and justice flourish among the many floating earthmotes upon which the ideal city is built. Erathis, Ioun, and Pelor reside within the city, along with hosts of angels and exalted souls. A scattering of beings from every mortal race inhabit or are passing through the city at any time and might rub shoulders with the angelic servants of other deities, eladrin lords, or even the odd devil that comes to the city to conduct business.

The domain consists of a great number of earthmotes that climb above the sparkling lagoon occupying the lower third of the domain. Hestavar sports normal gravity, but *soft drops*, areas that allow a character to float gently downward, connect many of the earthmotes to those higher or lower.

Radiance Affinity: Creatures gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls using radiant powers. Creatures deal only half damage with attacks using necrotic damage (though ongoing necrotic damage is unaffected).

Current Developments: Spurred by the recent death of Bahamut, many of the good and unaligned gods have come together to discuss Tiamat's actions and what they might do in response. Erathis, Ioun, and Pelor have withdrawn from Hestavar to attend this council, leaving the operation of the city in the hands of its angelic bureaucracy.

city plus the fact that the natives derive much good-natured entertainment from the bewilderment of mortal bumpkins means that their directions, while always accurate and precise, will seem insanely convoluted to foreigners. For those disinclined to navigate on foot, astral skiffs offer ferry services to the more popular destinations within the city for the reasonable price of a few platinum pieces a head.

The PCs can find almost any service or item they might be looking for within the city, and it is easy to lose sight of their mission amid all the bounty the Bright City has to offer. If they get too far off track, have their path pass close by the Swan Tower or even move up and repurpose encounter M1 by ambushing them while shopping—that should get them going again. Regardless of whether they head straight to it or detour, the Swan Tower is a landmark of Hestavar. Reaching it should be simple.

Kerith-Ald, the Swan Tower

Kerith-Ald occupies the entirety of its own earthmote. The majority of the many structures on the earthmote are given over to the magic academy, university, and vast library that make the tiny island of rock perhaps the greatest center of knowledge that exists. The Swan Tower for which the complex is named rises above all the others and is the private resting place and retreat of the goddess Ioun.

The fabulous library of the Swan Tower is far too large to be contained within any single structure on the earthmote; it is spread among several adjoining buildings. The storied halls are overflowing with every manner of tome, scroll, and loose paper imaginable, all meticulously cataloged and filed on one of the countless shelves or in some other receptacle by a veritable army of scribes and librarians. The knowledge contained within the library is freely available to all who seek it, but those that abuse this hospitality quickly find themselves expelled and barred from reentry by the hosts of Ioun.

During their research (i.e., once they have started the skill challenge), the characters are approached by an elderly gentleman. He would be indistinguishable from the host of other scholars frequenting the library were it not for the two small horns jutting from his forehead, red irises, and hoofed feet that proclaim his devilish origins. With a flourish and bow, he introduces himself as the humble planar historian and scholar Guionne and explains that he believes he and the heroes are searching for the same artifact. He, of course, has a purely academic interest in the artifact and would be most willing to lend the PCs his expertise in uncovering it for the chance to prove that it does indeed exist and that his theories about it are correct. He warns them, though, that this vein of research earns no good will from the guardians of the library, and that he has had to step carefully and move circuitously in order to avoid being expelled.

Guionne seems friendly and sincere in his offer. He will leave the characters to their own devices should they wish it, although he does occasionally stop by to add a helpful book to their pile, recommend a work by a particular author, or see if they have reconsidered his offer. Should they accept his help at any point, Guionne is delighted and bends all his expertise to assisting them in their search, tasking a pair of cherub-looking creatures to fetch critical tomes as he confers with the heroes. He is especially keen to point out potential targets for the PCs to spy upon, sheepishly blaming old habits if this is brought up.

Skill Challenge: H2. Researching the Visions (page 15).

The Next Move

With the information gained in the previous skill challenge in hand, the characters have some choices to make. They can attempt each of the first three seals in any order, but once they make their first move, the forces of Hestavar will be alerted. That makes making moving about the city a challenge. Before beginning, the heroes have time to finish business in the city and to take an extended rest if desired. When the PCs are ready to move on a seal, proceed to the appropriate section (Part Two, Three, or Four).

Part Two: The Dawnbell Bastion

The Dawnbell Bastion is a light fortification and garrison built and maintained by angels of Pelor upon three small, neighboring earthmotes. The elegant tower that rises several times the height of its sister buildings is open at the top, revealing the bastion's primary function as home to the Dawnbell. The bell that lends the complex its name tolls but once a day, announcing the beginning of each day in a city that knows no darkness.

The bastion can be reached by a soft fall that deposits travelers onto the largest of the earthmotes and can be left by a similar manner to reach motes below. The guardians are accustomed to their bastion being used in this manner and pay little heed to those arriving or leaving so long as they stray no further than the entrance to D1. The angelic defenders are not aware that the Dawnbell is one of the ancient seals, but they will brook no interference with their master's rightful property. They have been tasked with the defense of the bastion and will not be swayed.

D1. Meditation Garden

The angels that inhabit the bastion use this room and its sand garden to aid in their meditation. The doors are left open to enable those who have become lost to ask for assistance.

Tactical Encounter: D1. Pointed Meditation

D2. Golden Bridge

This fantastic bridge appears to be crafted from impossibly thin sheets and arches of gold and is painstakingly detailed with scenes of angels battling and emerging victorious over the forces of darkness.

Tactical Encounter: D2. Defending the Bastion

D3. Practice Hall

The larger of the two circular buildings is used by the defenders to practice and hone their martial skills in mock combat against each other. The angels within keep a sharp eye out for threats to the bastion.

Tactical Encounter: D3. Defending the Bastion

D4. Tower Base

The first of three balconies that ring the tower has gold-flecked marble walls that are pierced with arches that provide access to the tower proper. A low wall runs around the outer edge of the balcony.

D5. The Dawnbell

The uppermost balcony of the tower is open to the air to allow the tolling of the Dawnbell to be heard throughout the city. The archangel tasked with the defense of the bell can be found within this area at all times.

Tactical Encounter: D5. For Whom the Bell Tolls

Hestavar Alerted

The characters' attacks stir the Bright Guard and allied angelic forces into action. Bands of exalted take to the streets as flights of angels search from the air, forcing the heroes to tread carefully or attract the attention of the authorities.

Skill Challenge: H3. Dodging the Law

Part Three: The Seal of Erathis

The earthmote and mercantile district known as Methion is one of the most diverse and cosmopolitan markets to be found anywhere. Only the bazaar in the City of Brass comes close, and while artisans of Hestavar might grudgingly concede that the arms traded in the bazaar are more destructive, they are quick to point out that the markets of Methion are unequaled for weapons more sophisticated than a sharpened metal stick.

The earthmote is also home to the majority of the exalted houses dedicated to Erathis and involved in the Game of Making. It is here that the goddess chose to bind her seal, working it into the very ground of the main market square. Thousands of merchants and customers make their way across the seal each day, unaware of what lies beneath their feet.

Methion Side Streets

The back alleys and side streets in Hestavar may be cleaner and better lit than in any mortal city, but danger lurks even in the heart of the Bright City. Once again the celestial hosts of Bahamut seem to have it in for the PCs, but this time they are accompanied by disturbing new allies.

Tactical Encounter: M1. Back Alley Ambush

Market Square

The central market square of Methion teems with activity, barely slackening in the slightest even during the hours normally reserved for resting. Whether just passing through or browsing among the temporary stalls and carts that spring up across the square, thousands tread each day upon the massive symbol of Erathis that is emblazoned upon the flagstones. A small force of exalted soldiery moves through the crowd at all hours, keeping the peace and ensuring that thievery is all but unknown.

Tactical Encounter: M2. Market Day

Erathis's Faithful

When the characters attempt to disrupt the seal, the following tactical encounter is triggered as the seal summons the faithful to defend their mistress's property.

Tactical Encounter: M3. Last Ditch Defense

Hestavar Alerted

The heroes' attacks stir the Bright Guard and allied angelic forces into action. Bands of exalted take to the streets as flights of angels search from the air, forcing the PCs to tread carefully or attract the attention of the authorities.

Skill Challenge: H3. Dodging the Law

Part Four: The Sealed Library

Rather than defend her seal with angelic steel as Pelor chose to do or with the weight of civilization as Erathis did, Ioun hid hers away within the Sealed Library, a marvelous construction which is itself hidden in the fabric of the domain. Within its confines, trusted scholars have long worked on sensitive projects for their lady while standing vigil over the seal.

The open and well lit interior seems at odds with its cloistered nature, but the structure of the place is designed to promote contemplation while fostering research and advancement. The vast shelves could never contain the sheer quantity of lore required by the scholars ensconced within the library. They are tied through ancient ritual to every library that welcomes Ioun's presence. Books slip from the world and beyond to stock the shelves of the library before shifting back when no one is watching.

Searching the Streets

Entrances to the Sealed Library are hidden throughout the city, allowing the scholars to move about and gather whatever they might need for their work. Dead ends to back alleys behind alchemist's shops and spare rooms in rare book seller's stores are the places the characters must search, all without arousing unwanted suspicion.

Skill Challenge: L0. Unearthing the library

L1. The Library

Travelers to the library arrive in this room after stepping through one of the many doorways in Hestavar to emerge from the portal that ties them all together. The scholars who work within the library use this room to conduct their research, meditate on obscure arcanisms, and verbally spar with one another.

Tactical Encounter: L1. Angry Librarians

L2. Headmaster's Office

This well-furnished office is used by the scholar appointed by Ioun to oversee the running of the library. In addition to such duties, the headmaster also uses to the office to conduct private research and entertain guests who have been granted access to the library by the goddess.

Tactical Encounter: L2. Headmaster's Charge

Hestavar Alerted

The heroes' attacks stir the Bright Guard and allied angelic forces into action. Bands of exalted take to the streets as flights of angels search from the air, forcing the PCs to tread carefully or attract the attention of the authorities.

Skill Challenge: H3. Dodging the Law

Part Five: Storm's Fury

With each seal opened, the storm that rages perpetually over the district known as the Salts grows more intense. The breaking of the third seal is heralded by shrieking winds and roaring thunder. The uninhabited islands near to the center of the gale are raked with lightning as the storm's rage reaches heights never before seen and the waters of the lagoon begin to flow inward toward the eye of the storm.

It is in the eye, where no immortal dares to tread, that the final seal was placed, bound into an all but forgotten terror from the war at creation's beginning: Nakheten, the raging storm, a powerful storm titan lieutenant of the primordial Heur-Ket. Eons of captivity have not been kind to the storm titan, but while he is only a shadow of his former self, he remains a terrible force of insane rage and hatred.

Eye of the Storm

Within a cage formed of deific magic, Nakheten rages upon the scoured lagoon bed. The storm above roars and thunders in echo of his fury as he drives the waters of the lagoon into a frothing wall of destruction in a bid to free himself and resume his master's work.

Tactical Encounter: S1. Raging Storm

Washed Up

This nameless, uninhabited island lies near the heart of the storm. Its location and unique, bladelike rock formations ensure that a steady stream of waterlogged flotsam washes up with each tide. After the death of Nakheten sees the lagoon crashing back to reclaim the battlefield, the characters become just such refuse. Guionne and his devilish entourage are aware of the island's peculiar nature and have come to see what the tide drags in.

Tactical Encounter: S2. Guionne's Betrayal

Concluding the Adventure

Guionne's defeat sees the heroes free to flee the city unopposed, a wise course of action considering the forces of Hestavar are only expanding the hunt. With the *Arrow of Fate* in hand, the PCs have succeeded in their quest and undoubtedly secured a powerful artifact for the war against Tiamat, but the cost of this triumph is high and the repercussions of their actions are sure to be far reaching.

Roleplaying the *Arrow of Fate*

The *Arrow of Fate* does not communicate directly with its bearer, although latent emotions imprinted upon the Arrow do occasionally spill over. Normally these are confined to influencing preexisting feelings, nudging the bearer along rather than leading her. The only encounters that prompt the *Arrow* to directly influence its bearer are those with the servants of the primordial known as the King of Terror (toward which the bearer feels and unreasoning hatred); plots to resurrect that primordial; or stumbling across some long-forgotten method of reuniting Io's sundered halves.

The *Arrow of Fate*

Arrow of Fate **Epic Level**

An ancient shard of the fallen dragon god Io's physical form, the Arrow of Fate is a powerful weapon against the primordials and their servants. As a fragment of a greater god, the artifact is equally effective against the divine, for what better to harm a god with than a piece of another? The Arrow, created from the essence of the one that gave rise to them, also holds great power over the children of Io.

The *Arrow of Fate* can function as a rod, staff, or wand, as any weapon of the spear group, or as ammunition for a crossbow, longbow, or shortbow (in which case it overrides any enchantment the bow or crossbow may carry). Whatever its form, it is a +6 weapon of that type.

Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +6d8 damage, or +6d12 damage against dragons and creatures with the elemental or immortal origin

Property: Attacks using the *Arrow of Fate* ignore the first 5 points of resistance a dragon or creature with the elemental or immortal origin has, if any, to the damage.

Power (At-will): Minor Action: The *Arrow of Fate* transforms from its current form into one of the other implements, weapons, or ammunitions listed above.

Power (Daily ✦ Fire, Radiant): Standard Action. You breathe forth a blast of fire charged with the energy of the astral sea: Close blast 3; Constitution + 6 vs. Reflex; 4d12 + 8 fire and radiant damage. Miss: Half damage.

Goals of the *Arrow of Fate*

- ✦ Destroy the primordials and their servants
- ✦ Protect the world for which Io fought and was destroyed
- ✦ Prevent the twin halves of Io, the gods Tiamat and Bahamut, from resolving their eternal conflict by permanently destroying their opposite

CONCORDANCE

Starting score	**5**
Owner gains a level	**+1d10**
Owner slays a primordial	**+2**
Owner kills a servant of a primordial (max 1/day)	**+1**
Owner completes a quest to restore balance between Tiamat and Bahamut	**+1**
Owner flees from combat with a primordial or servants of one	**-1**
Owner knowingly aids a primordial or its servants	**-1**

Pleased (16-20)

"The essence of the sundered god and I are as one."

The *Arrow of Fate* has found a worthy bearer to entrust with its power.

Property: Attacks using the *Arrow of Fate* ignore the first 15 points of resistance a dragon or creature with the elemental or immortal origin has against the damage.

Property: Once per day, the *Arrow of Fate* can be used to perform the Raise Dead ritual without the need for components or its bearer having the ritual caster feat.

Power (Encounter ✦ Fire, Radiant): Standard Action. You breathe forth a blast of fire charged with the energy of the astral sea: Close blast 5; Constitution + 6 vs. Reflex; 4d12 + 8 fire and radiant damage. *Miss:* Half damage. This supersedes the normal close blast attack granted by the artifact.

Satisfied (12-15)

"I have routed the enemies of creation. With the Arrow's help, I will drive them before me."

The *Arrow of Fate* senses great promise in its bearer, granting increased powers to enable the bearer to achieve it.

Property: Attacks using the *Arrow of Fate* ignore the first 10 points of resistance a dragon or creature with the elemental or immortal origin has against the damage.

Power (Daily ✦ Fire, Radiant): Standard Action. You breathe forth a blast of fire charged with the energy of the astral sea: Close blast 5; Constitution + 6 vs. Reflex; 4d12 + 8 fire and radiant damage. *Miss:* Half damage. This supersedes the normal close blast attack granted by the artifact.

Power (Daily ✦ Fear): Standard Action. An aura of majestic terror washes over your enemies: Close burst 10; targets enemies; Constitution +6 or Charisma +6 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of your next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Normal (5-11)

"The threats to creation are endless. Another warrior is always welcomed."

Anyone willing to safeguard the world or oppose the primordials earns at least a passing chance from the *Arrow of Fate*.

Unsatisfied (1-4)

"Flight is unbefitting when the world is at stake."

The *Arrow* begins to find its bearer lacking and to withdraw its blessings.

Special: You take a -2 penalty to attack rolls and damage rolls against creatures other than servants of a primordial or those with the elemental origin. This penalty applies whether you are using or merely carrying the *Arrow*.

Displeased (0 or Lower)

"Cowardice in the face of or allying with the forces that seek to undo creation is unforgivable."

The Arrow is disgusted with its bearer. Only a sudden or dramatic turn of events will prevent it from abandoning the failed bearer in short order.

Special: You take a -5 penalty to attack rolls and damage rolls against creatures other than servants of a primordial or those with the elemental origin. This penalty applies whether you are using or merely carrying the *Arrow*.

Special: Whenever you move away from an enemy without ending closer to another or making an attack that round, the *Arrow* makes the following attack against you as an immediate interrupt: Constitution +6 vs. Will; the target is slowed until the start of its next turn.

Moving On

"The Arrow has given me what aid it can. It is time to stand on my own."

The *Arrow of Fate* believes it has accomplished what it can with its current bearer and that its goals would be better served elsewhere.

When the bearer next gains a level, the *Arrow of Fate* disappears, continuing its eternal struggle elsewhere. If its concordance was at least 5, it leaves behind a +6 elementalbane version of its current or most used form. If this form is an implement, the daily power deals 2d10 rather than 2[W] damage and uses the owner's primary casting stat in place of Strength.

Until it moves on, the *Arrow of Fate* retains all the powers and properties appropriate for its current concordance.

H1. A Warm Welcome

Encounter Level 25 (39,500 XP)

Setup

2 silver dragons errant (D)
12 angels of light (Off top and right edges of map)

A strike force, seemingly from the celestial hosts of Bahamut, lies in wait for the characters to begin crossing the open sandbar. Once their prey is exposed, the dragons lead their angelic minions in a glorious charge.

When the dragons begin their attack, read:

A shining pair of silver dragons plummets toward you with a thunderous roar, their eagerness obviously getting the better of their tactical sense. A dozen brilliant angelic figures follow silently and purposefully behind, their burning glaives held at the ready.

12 Angels of Light **Level 23 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium immortal humanoid (angel) XP 1,275 each

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +19
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion; see also *death burst*.
AC 37; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 36
Immune fear; **Resist** 15 radiant
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover)

⊕ **Angelic Glaive** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +28 vs. AC; 15 damage.

✧ **Death Burst** (when the angel of light drops to 0 hit points) ✦**Radiant**
The angel of light explodes in a burst of radiant light: close burst 10; targets enemies; +26 vs. Fortitude; the target is blinded until the end of its next turn. *Effect:* Angels in the burst gain 10 temporary hit points.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Supernal
Str 18 (+15) **Dex** 23 (+17) **Wis** 27 (+19)
Con 23 (+17) **Int** 15 (+13) **Cha** 23 (+17)
Equipment glaive.

Tactics

The dragons brashly rush into combat and lead off with their most powerful attacks. They use *breath weapon* whenever it recharges, laying about themselves with *tail smash* or *errant's fury* when their more impressive abilities are unavailable. The angels are more methodical, setting up flanks and ganging up to take down a single target rather than randomly charging into the fray.

The angels fight to the end, but a dragon pulls back to the edges of the combat to launch *breath weapon* attacks when seriously injured. Should both dragons be in danger of dying, they flee, leaving the angels to their fate.

2 Silver Dragons Errant (D) **Level 24 Elite Brute**
Huge natural magical beast (dragon) XP 12,100 each

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +19; darkvision
HP 564; **Bloodied** 282; see also *bloodied breath*
AC 36; **Fortitude** 38, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 34
Resist 30 cold
Saving Throws +2
Speed 10, fly 10 (hover), overland flight 15
Action Points 1

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +27 vs. AC; 4d6 + 8 damage.

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +27 vs. AC; 2d8 + 8 damage.

✧ **Tail Smash** (standard; at-will)
Close blast 3; one, two, or three enemies in blast; +25 vs. AC; 4d6 + 8 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

✧ **Errant's Fury** (standard; at-will)
The silver dragon errant makes two claw attacks and one bite attack.

✧ **Breath Weapon** (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Cold**
Close blast 5; +23 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 8 cold damage, and the target gains vulnerable 10 to all damage (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage.

✧ **Bloodied Breath** (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Cold**
Breath weapon recharges, and the silver dragon errant uses it.

✧ **Frightful Presence** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 10; targets enemies; +23 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the silver dragon errant's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Unstoppable
A silver dragon errant makes saving throws against ongoing damage at the start of its turn as well as at the end of its turn.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Athletics +27, Insight +19
Str 31 (+21) **Dex** 24 (+19) **Wis** 14 (+14)
Con 26 (+20) **Int** 14 (+14) **Cha** 22 (+18)

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light.

Rock Outcroppings: These rocky outcroppings are 10 feet tall. They can be climbed with a DC 24 Athletics check. The central outcropping is pierced by an arch large enough for medium creatures to operate in freely. Creatures under the arch gain cover from attacks originating above them.

Water: Both the small pool and the lagoon are relatively shallow and can be moved through but count as difficult terrain.

H2. Researching the Visions

Encounter Level 24 (30,250 XP)

Setup

The Swan Tower is home to quite possibly the finest university, magic academy, and library to be found among the planes. If the information the heroes seek on Amyria's strange visions and the artifact depicted within can be uncovered anywhere, the prestigious halls of the Swan Tower will hold the answers.

Researching the Visions	**Level 24**
Skill Challenge	XP 30,250

The halls of Kerith-Ald are steeped in lore long forgotten elsewhere. Somewhere within the Swan Tower, an ancient tome or equally ancient scholar must hold the answers.

Complexity
5 (requires 12 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills
Arcana, Bluff, History, Religion, Stealth

Secondary Skills
Diplomacy, Insight, Streetwise

Victory
The PCs manage to uncover the information contained within the sidebar on page 16.

Defeat
The characters not only fail to uncover the information they need, but their antics and the fact that they were delving into sensitive areas get them barred from returning to the library for a year and a day.

Arcana (DC 29, 1 success, no maximum)
The hero delves through the countless works of obscure arcana searching for anything relevant or draws out useful information by engaging in discourse with another scholar versed in the subject.

Bluff (DC 29, 1 success, no maximum)
Posing as a visiting devotee of ancient divine lore or promising to credit a scholar in the groundbreaking paper the PC is this close to finishing, the character gleans useful information from the inhabitants of the Swan Tower.

Diplomacy (DC 29 or 33, 0 successes)
A success on this check does not count as a success for the challenge but does grant a +2 bonus to the next skill check. Likewise, failure does not count as a failure for the challenge but instead imposes a -2 penalty to the next skill check. Alternatively, a character can use this skill to remove one failure caused by the use of Intimidate, with success on a DC 33 check. Success removes the failure but grants no other bonus, while failure still imposes a -2 penalty to the next skill check.
The character smoothes the way with their considerate approach, removing problems before they occur and ensuring everyone remains happy.

History (DC 29, 1 success, no maximum)
The hero finds links to other historical events. By working backward from those, she uncovers information the party seeks.

Insight (DC 29, 0 successes)
A success on this check does not count as a success for the challenge but does grant a +2 bonus to the next skill check. Likewise, failure does not count as a failure for the challenge but instead imposes a -2 penalty to the next skill check.
The PC scouts out scholars that seem to have the knowledge necessary, setting them up for other characters, or uses their skills to keep the rest of the party motivated and focused.

Intimidate
Attempts to use Intimidate result in an automatic failure.
The inhabitants of the Swan Tower are either immovable extensions of divine will or break down and babble incoherently when confronted, yielding no useful information either way. Such strongarm tactics do, however, draw the attention of the tower's angelic guardians.

Religion (DC 29, 1 success, no maximum)
Sifting through the archives on the ancient history of the divine, guided by the character's knowledge of the players involved, or engaging in theological debate earns the hero a vital bit of lore.

Stealth (DC 29, 1 success, no maximum)
The PC manages to slip quietly into a portion of the library where he or she wouldn't normally be allowed and overhears a juicy bit of information regarding the artifact.

Streetwise (DC 29, 0 successes)
A success on this check does not count as a success for the challenge but does grant a +2 bonus to the next skill check. Likewise, failure does not count as a failure for the challenge but instead imposes a -2 penalty to the next skill check.
Even in the cloistered libraries of the Kerith-Ald there are things people are willing to trade favors for. Credit, time with rare tomes, access to a rival's notes; the character facilitates these things, turning favors earned to the advantage of the party.

Once the heroes begin the skill challenge, Guionne (who keeps a close eye on the goings-on at the library) approaches them and offers his services. Should they accept his offer of assistance, his insights provide a +2 bonus to all checks made from that point on. Even if the characters refuse his first offer of help, he leaves them with a tip that proves accurate and provides a +2 bonus to the next check made (alternatively, the DM may reveal an approach to this skill challenge that the players haven't thought of, such as the use of Streetwise). Guionne approaches a second time after that check, hoping his beneficial aid changed the characters' minds. He can approach the group as a whole or single out one or two characters whom he deems the most likely to welcome his help.

Development

Success in the challenge reveals the enormity of the task ahead of the heroes, what might be at stake, and the far-reaching repercussions of removing the *Arrow of Fate* from Hestavar. If the PCs accepted Guionne's help during their research, he hovers nearby while the characters discuss their options and next move. If not, than he eavesdrops on the discussion anyway. At an appropriate time, he interjects himself into the conversation, claiming to feel solidarity with the heroes and offering his assistance once more. He is quite sure the servants of the three gods that call

The Arrow of Fate

During their research into the strange visions plaguing Amyria, the characters uncover the following information.

The flesh-wrapped bone arrow described by Amyria appears to be the artifact known as the *Arrow of Fate*, a relic from the terrible Dawn War, when gods fought primordials for control of the world. The original dragon god Io was cut down during that struggle by the primordial known as the King of Terror. When the sundered halves of the deity fell to the ground, they sprang up as the twin gods Tiamat and Bahamut. A single fragment of Io's physical form remained separated from the newly birthed gods, and it was this tiny shard of divinity that became the *Arrow*.

The *Arrow of Fate* is a potent weapon against both the primordial and the divine, forged as it was during the upheaval of the Dawn War. As time wore on, claims arose that it was capable of exerting a powerful influence over the forces of life and death. Eventually the artifact became an issue of contention between the archdevil Asmodeus and the trio of gods Erathis, Ioun, and Pelor. Asmodeus sought access to Hestavar's knowledge for his devils and followers. In a show of cooperation characteristic of an earlier age, the three gods granted this, but only with guarantees that Asmodeus and his adherents would treat Hestavar, its environs, and the souls of its inhabitants as strictly off-limits for their usual deviltry. Asmodeus agreed, and to cement this bargain, the *Arrow of Fate* was locked away in Hestavar on condition that the pact would stand for as long as the *Arrow* remained within the city. Sealing away the *Arrow* was Asmodeus's suggestion, but it suited the interests of all parties.

To safeguard the *Arrow* and ensure that the accord would last, Erathis, Ioun, and Pelor wove a great ritual in four parts, one for each of the deities and a fourth representing their collaboration. Each of the gods warded their seal in their own way. Pelor forged his into the form of a great bell that would announce the coming of dawn and set a garrison of angels to watch over the bastion constructed to hold it. Erathis bound her seal into the very flagstones of the largest market square upon the mercantile earthmote and neighborhood of Methion. Ioun secreted hers away within the Sealed Library, a cloistered haven hidden within the fabric of the domain, where a trusted few researched sensitive projects for their lady. The fourth seal, protected by the first three, rests under the constant storm that marks the Salts district. It is accessible only should each of the others be undone. Even so, the gods set a terrible foe from the Dawn War to guard the *Arrow* from any who would disturb it.

Hestavar home will not be understanding of the PCs' quest and will react badly to any attempts to open the seals. Guionne cannot aid in the coming battles that he sees as inevitable, both because he has no skill for such things and because of the pact between Asmodeus and Hestavar. He can offer the characters the use of two houses in the city. Guionne is certain that no one could trace them to back to him, and they could be invaluable to the characters as safe havens. Whether or not the heroes accept his offer of sanctuary, Guionne gives them the addresses before departing quietly to avoid attracting undue attention.

Failure leaves the heroes in a difficult position. Not only are they still in the dark about the nature of the *Arrow of Fate*, but they are barred from further research in the library. Fortunately for them, Guionne is not considered part of their cabal and is not expelled from the library. He offers to share his research with the characters, claiming that with their insights, he'll be able to uncover the truth in just a few days. Should they agree, he returns with the information in two days, at which point he suggests the heroes make use of his two safe houses, as above. If the PCs adamantly refuse to have anything to do with Guionne and fail the challenge, they return to where they are staying to find a courier has dropped off an anonymous packet of concise information regarding the seals, complete with warnings about the authorities' reactions and the locations of two safe houses. This, of course, came from Guionne.

H3. Dodging the Law

Encounter Level 24 (12,100 XP)

Setup

After the characters launch an attack upon or open one of the first three seals, the peacekeeping forces of Hestavar scramble to apprehend the "violent criminals." Once alerted, exalted patrols begin sweeping the streets as flights of angels search from the skies. This makes moving about the city a difficult prospect if the heroes wish to avoid confrontation with the authorities.

These patrols continue for the duration of this adventure, meaning that the PCs will engage in this skill challenge three times, once after breaking each seal.

Dodging the Law	**Level 24**
Skill Challenge	XP 12,100

Exalted and angelic patrols are out in force, combing the streets for the characters. The party must tread lightly or draw unwanted attention.

Complexity
2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills
Insight, Stealth, Streetwise

Secondary Skills
Intimidate, Perception

Victory
The heroes manage to evade the forces of justice.

Defeat
The PCs are discovered and set upon by a patrol; see Development.

Insight (DC 29, 1 success, no maximum)
After observing the patterns of the patrols, the characters recognize a safe time to leave the area.

Intimidate (DC 29, 0 successes)
A success on this check does not count as a success for the challenge but does grant a +2 bonus to the next skill check. Likewise, failure does not count as a failure for the challenge but instead imposes a -2 penalty to the next skill check.
The hero pressures those that have seen the party to remain quiet or suffer unpleasant consequences. The risk, of course, is that they will run to the authorities all the faster once the PC moves on.

Perception (DC 29, 0 successes)
A success on this check does not count as a success for the challenge but does grant a +2 bonus to the next skill check. Likewise, failure does not count as a failure for the challenge but instead imposes a -2 penalty to the next skill check.
The characters notice a sheltered back alley or unorthodox path across the earthmotes that seems lightly traveled and might therefore be lightly patrolled.

Stealth (DC 28, 1 success, no maximum)
Attempts to use this skill suffer a -2 penalty for each party member that is not trained in Stealth.
The character coaches the rest of the party on the art of stealth, attempting to slip the group past the patrols unnoticed.

Streetwise (DC 29, 1 success, no maximum)
The maze of streets and alleys is a second home to the PC, her keen understanding of the urban jungle enabling her to guide the party down paths the law would never think to check.

Development

Success lets the characters avoid the patrols searching for them as they move about the city. Failure means the heroes are spotted by a patrol that consists of either one Angel of Command and five Angels of Light (see D1 for stats) or one Exalted Captain and four Exalted Patrollers (see M2 for their stats). After fleeing the scene or dealing with the patrol, the PCs are able to make it to their destination.

D1. Pointed Meditation

Encounter Level 25 (35,050 XP)

Setup

2 angels of command (C)
2 angels of authority (A)
10 angels of light (L)

Gleaming doors seemingly crafted from solid gold and covered with bas-reliefs of angels triumphing over the forces of darkness are thrown open, revealing a scene of intense serenity. An immaculately manicured sand garden lies surrounded by reflecting pools in the center of a circular room. A number of angelic figures in deep contemplation are spread about the area or perched on the balcony that runs the circumference of the room.

10 Angels of Light (L) **Level 23 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium immortal humanoid (angel) XP 1,275 each
Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +19
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion; see also *death burst*.
AC 37; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 36
Immune fear; **Resist** 15 radiant
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover)
⊕ **Angelic Glaive** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +28 vs. AC; 15 damage.
✧ **Death Burst** (when the angel of light drops to 0 hit points) ✦ **Radiant**
The angel of light explodes in a burst of radiant light: close burst 10; targets enemies; +26 vs. Fortitude; the target is blinded until the end of its next turn. *Effect:* Angels in the burst gain 10 temporary hit points.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Supernal
Str 18 (+15) **Dex** 23 (+17) **Wis** 27 (+19)
Con 23 (+17) **Int** 15 (+13) **Cha** 23 (+17)
Equipment glaive

If this is the first seal the characters attempt to open, the nearest angel turns from its meditation when the heroes enter the room and addresses them:

"Welcome to the Dawnbell Bastion, citizens. There is no shame in seeking guidance in the Bright City, for none are truly lost who seek the path. Where is it that you desire to go?"

Should the PCs name a destination, the angel provides detailed and precise directions. If the characters attempt to move past the angel or respond that they wish to proceed farther into the bastion, angels move to block off the stairs and the original angel states:

"None may trespass within the bastion by the will of the lord Pelor. It is time for you to leave."

The angels will not make the first move, but it is obvious that they will not be swayed in their duty. Violence or attempts to forcibly push past an angel to gain the stairs, along with any other means of moving further into the bastion, cause the angels to attack.

If this is not the first seal the heroes have visited, the angels recognize them and attack once the characters are in the room.

Tactics

The angels of command lead the charge, one attempting to catch as many PCs as possible with its *edict of honor* while the other uses *honor strike* to immobilize the most dangerous-looking foe. They attempt to keep as many characters as possible marked in order to gain the benefits of *lead the faithful* and to protect their allies, employing *from one, many* at the first opportunity.

The angels of authority hang back, preferably on the second level, to blast at the party. They fly forward to unleash *majestic rally* when it is available. The angels of light swarm the foe, setting up flanks for themselves and the angels of command and focusing their attacks on critical targets. A few might hang back to prevent loose PCs from moving up the stairs to attack the angels of authority.

The angels fight intelligently and methodically to the end.

2 Angels of Authority (A) **Level 22 Controller (Leader)**
Large immortal humanoid (angel) XP 4,150 each
Initiative +17 **Senses** Perception +18
HP 203; **Bloodied** 101
AC 36; **Fortitude** 32, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 35
Immune fear; **Resist** 15 radiant
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover)
⊕ **Quarterstaff** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**
Reach 2; +27 vs. AC; 1d10 + 8 damage plus 1d10 radiant damage.
↗ **Lightning Bolt** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Ranged 10; +26 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 8 lightning damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the angel of authority's next turn.
✧ **Majestic Rally** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Radiant, Thunder**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +26 vs. Will; 1d10 + 8 radiant damage plus 1d10 thunder damage, and the target is weakened (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage. *Effect:* Any angel within the burst gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls until the end of the angel of authority's next turn.
Angelic Presence (while not bloodied)
Any attack against the angel of authority takes a -2 penalty to the attack roll.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Supernal
Skills Insight +23, Religion +23
Str 20(+16) **Dex** 22(+17) **Wis** 25 (+18)
Con 19(+15) **Int** 24(+18) **Cha** 27(+19)
Equipment plate armor, quarterstaff

2 Angels of Command (C)	Level 25 Soldier (Leader)
Large immortal humanoid (angel)	XP 7,000 each
Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +18	
HP 234; **Bloodied** 117	
AC 41; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 36	
Immune fear; **Resist** 15 radiant	
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover)	
Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Reach 2; +32 vs. AC; 3d8 + 9 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the angel of command's next turn.	
Honor Strike (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**	
Reach 2; +32 vs. AC; 3d8 + 9 damage and the target is marked, immobilized, and takes ongoing 15 radiant damage (save ends all).	
Edict of Honor (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Thunder**	
Close burst 3; +28 vs. Will; 3d8 + 9 thunder damage, and the target is marked until the end of the angel of command's next turn, and the angel of command pulls the target 2 squares.	
Lead the Faithful	
Allies deal 5 extra radiant damage when they hit a creature marked by an angel of command.	
From One, Many (immediate reaction when an angel minion ally within 5 squares is reduced to 0 or fewer hit points; encounter)	
Four angel minions of the same type rise from the remains of the triggering angelic minion. These minions appear in the square in which the triggering minion fell, or the nearest unoccupied square. The new minions act on the same initiative count as the triggering minion.	
Angelic Presence (while not bloodied)	
Any attack against the angel of command takes a -2 penalty to the attack roll.	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Supernal	
Skills Athletics +27, Insight +19	
Str 29 (+21) **Dex** 21 (+17) **Wis** 22 (+18)	
Con 26 (+20) **Int** 25 (+19) **Cha** 22 (+18)	
Equipment full plate, heavy shield, longsword	

Features of the Area

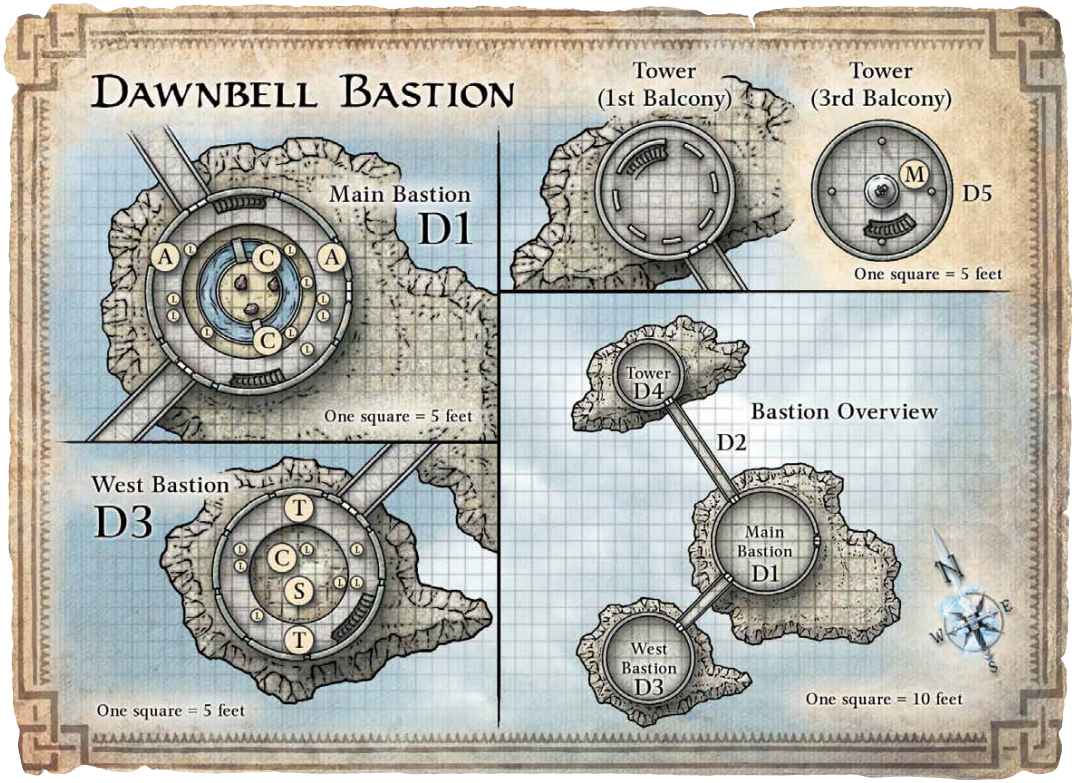
Illumination: Bright light streams through the many arrow slits in the second story.

Reflecting Pools: The pools are knee deep and are difficult terrain.

Sand Garden: The sand garden can be moved through freely, although this destroys the carefully tended designs. Clambering onto one of the large rocks takes an extra square of movement.

Stairs: Squares containing stairs are difficult terrain.

Second Story: The second story is open over the center of the room and has no railing. Characters that fall from the second story take 2d10 damage.



D3. Defending the Bastion

Encounter Level 24 (34,075 XP)

Setup

1 angel of command (C)
1 angel of supremacy (S)
2 angels of thunder (T)
7 angels of light (L)

Where this encounter occurs depends on the characters. If they attack into area D3, they catch the angels unawares. The characters earn a surprise round, and the encounter begins with the angels in the positions marked. If the heroes strike out across the bridge (area D2) that leads to area D4 of the tower, the angels of thunder automatically see them as they move onto the bridge and the encounter will be fought primarily on the bridge and in area D4 of the tower.

7 Angels of Light (L) — **Level 23 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium immortal humanoid (angel) — XP 1,275 each

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +19
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion; see also *death burst*.
AC 37; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 36
Immune fear; **Resist** 15 radiant
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover)

Angelic Glaive (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +28 vs. AC; 15 damage.

Death Burst (when the angel of light drops to 0 hit points) ✦ **Radiant**
The angel of light explodes in a burst of radiant light: close burst 10; targets enemies; +26 vs. Fortitude; the target is blinded until the end of its next turn. *Effect:* Angels in the burst gain 10 temporary hit points.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Supernal
Str 18 (+16) **Dex** 23 (+18) **Wis** 27 (+20)
Con 23 (+18) **Int** 15 (+14) **Cha** 23 (+18)
Equipment glaive

Angel of Supremacy (S) — **Level 24 Soldier**
Large immortal humanoid (angel) — XP 6,050

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +18
HP 226; **Bloodied** 113
AC 40; **Fortitude** 38, **Reflex** 36, **Will** 35
Immune fear; **Resist** 15 radiant
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover)

Spear (standard; at-will) ✦ **Thunder, Weapon**
Reach 3; +31 vs. AC; 1d10 + 9 damage plus 1d10 thunder damage.

Light of Justice (standard; encounter) ✦ **Radiant**
Ranged 10; +29 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 9 radiant damage.
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the encounter.

Summons to Justice (minor 1/round; at-will)
Ranged sight; targets creatures marked by the angel of supremacy; no attack roll; the angel of supremacy pulls the target 1 square.

Astral Brilliance (standard; encounter) ✦ **Radiant, Zone**
Close burst 3; +29 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 9 radiant damage.
Effect The burst creates a zone of radiance that lasts until the end of the encounter. The angel of supremacy's spear attack deals 1d10 extra radiant damage while the angel is within the zone.

Angelic Presence (while not bloodied)
Any attack against the angel of supremacy takes a -2 penalty to the attack roll.

Threatening Reach
An angel of supremacy can make opportunity attacks against all enemies in reach.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Supernal
Skills Intimidate +21
Str 29 (+21) **Dex** 21 (+17) **Wis** 22 (+18)
Con 26(+20) **Int** 25 (+19) **Cha** 19(+16)
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, spear

Tactics

If the encounter takes place in area D3, the angels are surprised by the heroes. The angel of command and angel of supremacy, who were sparring, fly up to engage the PCs and keep them from reaching the angels of thunder. The angels of light swarm forward, ganging up on characters to bring them down. The two angels of thunder hang back and fire into the heroes from the safest spot they can find, using *thunder wing* to escape melee.

If the PCs move onto the bridge (area D2), an angel of thunder spots them immediately. The angels of light fly out to engage the characters as they cross the bridge while the two angels of thunder blast away at the party. The angel of command and the angel of supremacy move out the following round and position themselves to prevent the heroes from crossing the bridge. If the PCs withdraw to maximum range or if the combat drags on for more than five rounds, then the angels of thunder abandon their defensive positions and attempt to hurl the characters off the bridge with their *thunder wing* power.

The angels fight to the death.

2 Angels of Thunder (T) — **Level 24 Artillery**
Large immortal humanoid (angel) — XP 6,050 each

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +20
HP 173; **Bloodied** 86
AC 36; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 36, **Will** 37
Immune fear; **Resist** 15 radiant
Speed 10, fly 12 (hover)

Quarterstaff (standard; at-will) ✦ **Thunder, Weapon**
Reach 2; +31 vs. AC; 1d6 + 8 damage plus 1d10 thunder damage.

Thunder Crack (standard; at-will) ✦ **Thunder**
Ranged 20; +29 vs. Fortitude; 2d12 + 8 thunder damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Thunder Wing (standard; at-will) ✦ **Thunder**
Close burst 3; targets enemies; +29 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 8 thunder damage, and the angel of thunder pushes the target 2 squares. *Effect:* The angel of thunder shifts 2 squares.

Dancing Lightning (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning**
Ranged 20; targets one, two, or three enemies in range; +29 vs. Reflex; 3d12 + 8 lightning damage.

Angelic Presence (while not bloodied)
Any attack against the angel of authority takes a -2 penalty to the attack roll.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Supernal
Skills Insight +23, Religion +23
Str 20(+16) **Dex** 22(+17) **Wis** 25 (+18)
Con 19(+15) **Int** 24(+18) **Cha** 27(+19)
Equipment quarterstaff

Angel of Command (C)	**Level 25 Soldier (Leader)**
Large immortal humanoid (angel)	XP 7,000
Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +18	
HP 234; **Bloodied** 117	
AC 41; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 36	
Immune fear; **Resist** 15 radiant	
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover)	
Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Reach 2; +32 vs. AC; 3d8 + 9 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the angel of command's next turn.	
Honor Strike (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**	
Reach 2; +32 vs. AC; 3d8 + 9 damage and the target is marked, immobilized, and takes ongoing 15 radiant damage (save ends all).	
Edict of Honor (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Thunder**	
Close burst 3; +28 vs. Will; 3d8 + 9 thunder damage, and the target is marked until the end of the angel of command's next turn, and the angel of command pulls the target 2 squares.	
Lead the Faithful	
Allies deal 5 extra radiant damage when they hit a creature marked by an angel of command.	
From One, Many (immediate reaction when an angel minion ally within 5 squares is reduced to zero or fewer hit points; encounter)	
Four angel minions of the same type rise from the remains of the triggering angelic minion. These minions appear in the square in which the triggering minion fell, or the nearest unoccupied square. The new minions act on the same initiative count as the triggering minion.	
Angelic Presence (while not bloodied)	
Any attack against the angel of command takes a -2 penalty to the attack roll.	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Supernal	
Skills Athletics +27, Insight +19	
Str 29 (+21) **Dex** 21 (+17) **Wis** 22 (+18)	
Con 26 (+20) **Int** 25 (+19) **Cha** 22 (+18)	
Equipment full plate, heavy shield, longsword	

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light illuminates all the possible combat arenas.

Stairs: Squares containing stairs are difficult terrain.

Doors: The golden doors to area D3 and D4 are not barred and can be opened easily.

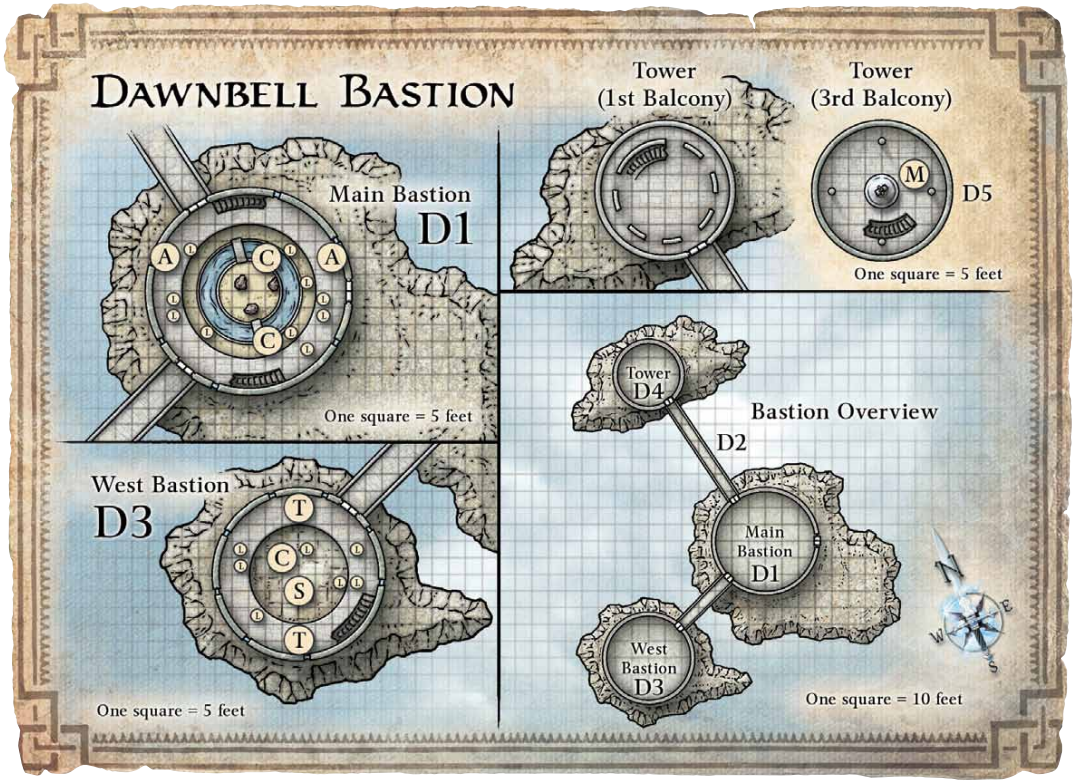
Golden Bridge: The bridge (area D2), despite the airy feeling of its construction, is stable and movement across the bridge incurs no penalties. The bridge is open to the air, and any creature forced off faces a long drop to the nearest earthmote below. The low railing allows a creature a saving throw to avoid the fall, with those successful falling prone in the nearest square on the bridge. Those that fail fall 100 feet, take 10d10 falling damage, and are going to have a hard time returning to the fight before it's over. Creatures capable of flying fall eight squares before managing to halt themselves, take no falling damage, and are free to fly back into the combat on their turn.

Second Story: The second story of area D3 is open over the center of the room and has no railing.

Combat Matting: The ground floor of area D3 is covered with thick mats to prevent injuries occurring while the angels spar. Falling from the second story incurs no damage as the padding absorbs the force, but does still knock one prone.

Arrow Slits: The arrow slits on the second story of D3 give the occupants cover but do not restrict their ability to attack out.

Tower Balcony: The balcony of area D4 is enclosed behind a low wall which grants cover to medium-sized creatures behind it. A series of arches provide access to the tower's interior. Large creatures must squeeze to fit onto the balcony but can pass through the arches unhindered.



D5. For Whom the Bell Tolls

Encounter Level 26 (50,200 XP)

Setup

Memar (M)
Dawnbell
8 angels of light (L)

Memar stands where indicated. The angels of light are not present at the beginning of the encounter.

When the heroes enter the area, read:

A massive figure radiating a palpable aura of righteousness and power awaits you at the top of the tower. Its armor, crafted from gold and mithral, bears impossibly detailed scenes of angelic forces waging war against all manner of dire foes, as does the titanic greatsword it holds before itself. Turning its featureless face to you, a voice like echoing thunder intones:

"The charge to defend the Dawnbell was laid upon me by the lord Pelor, master of the Radiant Host, the Dawn Bringer. You shall not stand against his will."

8 Angels of Light Level 23 Minion Skirmisher
Medium immortal humanoid (angel) XP 1,275 each

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +19
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion; see also *death burst*.
AC 37; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 36
Immune fear; **Resist** 15 radiant
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover)

⊕ **Angelic Glaive** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +28 vs. AC; 15 damage.

✧ **Death Burst** (when the angel of light drops to 0 hit points) ✦ **Radiant**
The angel of light explodes in a burst of radiant light: close burst 10; targets enemies; +26 vs. Fortitude; the target is blinded until the end of its next turn. *Effect:* Angels in the burst gain 10 temporary hit points.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Supernal
Str 18 (+15) **Dex** 23 (+17) **Wis** 27 (+19)
Con 23 (+17) **Int** 15 (+13) **Cha** 23 (+17)
Equipment glaive

Memar, Archangel of Protection (M) **Level 27 Elite Soldier**
Large immortal humanoid (angel) XP 22,000

Initiative +20 **Senses** Perception +21
Blazing Radiance aura 5; enemies treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain and take a -2 penalty to attack rolls as long as Memar is not bloodied.
HP 560; **Bloodied** 280
AC 45; **Fortitude** 42, **Reflex** 39, **Will** 44
Immune fear; **Resist** 15 Radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover)
Action Points 1

⊕ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +32 vs. AC; 3d8 + 9 damage.

⸸ **Warding Strike** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**
Reach 2; +32 vs. AC; 3d8 + 9 damage, and the first time the target makes an attack before the end of its next turn it takes 3d8 + 9 radiant damage.

✧ **Overwhelming Presence** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Radiant**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +31 vs. Will; 1d8 + 9 radiant damage, and the target is stunned until the end of Memar's next turn.

Dawnbell Warden
When Memar is within 5 squares of the Dawnbell, the Dawnbell takes only half damage from melee and ranged attacks; Memar takes the rest. While Memar is adjacent to the Dawnbell, the Dawnbell gains a +2 bonus to its defenses.

Retribution (while not bloodied) ✦ **Radiant**
A creature that makes a successful melee attack against Memar takes 3d8 radiant damage.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Supernal
Skills Athletics +27, Insight +19
Str 29 (+22) **Dex** 21 (+18) **Wis** 25 (+21)
Con 28 (+22) **Int** 20 (+18) **Cha** 22 (+19)
Equipment full plate, greatsword

Dawnbell	**Level 26 Elite Blaster**
Trap	XP 18,000

The great silver bell before you begins to toll with a terrible power, crushing the resolve and bodies of those who would trespass against Pelor.

Trap: When a creature attacks an angel of Pelor within 5 squares of the bell or the bell itself, it begins to toll.

Perception

No check is required to see the Dawnbell.

Additional Skills: Arcana or Religion

DC 36: The character recognizes the power contained within the bell.

Initiative +13

Trigger

When a creature attacks an angel of Pelor within 5 squares or the bell itself, the trap activates and rolls for initiative.

Attack

When the Dawnbell attacks, roll a d4 to determine which attack it uses.

Standard Action **Close** burst 5

Target: All creatures in burst (angels are immune)

1 **Attack:** +28 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 4d10 + 9 thunder and force damage and the target is pushed 3 squares and deafened (save ends).

2 **Attack:** +28 vs. Will

Hit: 4d10 + 9 thunder and radiant damage and the target is weakened (save ends).

3 **Attack:** +28 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 4d10 + 9 thunder and necrotic damage and ongoing 15 necrotic (save ends).

4 **Attack:** +28 vs. Will

Hit: 4d10 + 9 thunder and psychic damage, and the target is knocked prone and takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls and all defenses (save ends) and provokes an opportunity attack from adjacent angels.

Countermeasures

An adjacent character can prevent the trap from attacking for a round with a DC 36 Thievery check. Failure causes the Dawnbell to attack as an immediate reaction.

A character can attack the Dawnbell itself (AC 39, other defenses 36; hp 180), but doing so causes it to attack as an immediate reaction. Destroying the Dawnbell disables the trap.

Tactics

Memar waits for the PCs to make the first move, preparing a warding strike against the first character to move within range if it wins initiative. Memar attempts to remain adjacent to the Dawnbell if possible, but will move if doing so is advantageous. The archangel is confident in *dawnbell warden's* ability to protect the Dawnbell and leaves the bell's inherent properties to protect it from direct attack. If the bell takes more than 100 damage, Memar moves to prevent further attacks.

The first four angels of light appear during the third round of combat, flying in on their initiative count, while the rest show up the round after Memar is bloodied. They move to set up flanking positions and focus attacks on ranged or supporting heroes not engaged in melee.

The angels fight to the end.

The Seal

Destroying the Dawnbell breaks the seal. If Memar and all of the angels of light are killed, the Dawnbell continues to toll for that round before tearing apart the first time it is attacked the next round.

Features of the Area

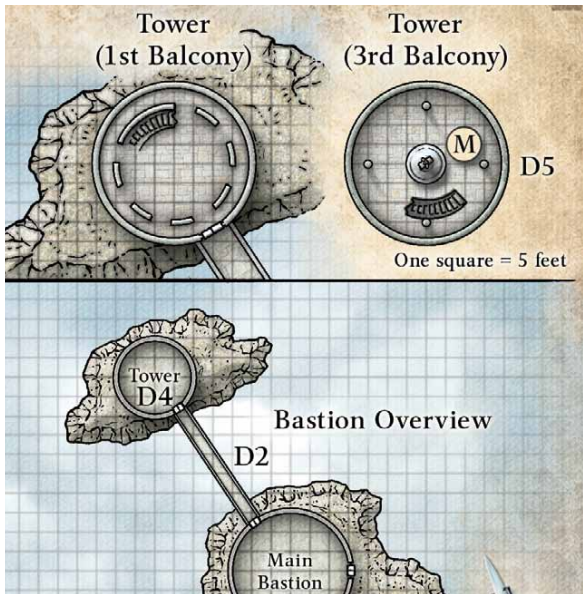
Illumination: Bright light.

Dawnbell: The Dawnbell fills the squares it occupies, preventing movement through them.

Pillars: The white marble pillars are wound about with silver and gold. They do not hinder movement but provide cover against melee attacks as normal.

Stairs: Squares containing stairs are difficult terrain.

Open Balcony: This level is open to the heavens, and any creature forced off faces a long drop to the earthmote below. A low wall running around the exterior allows a creature a saving throw to avoid the fall, with those successful falling prone in the nearest square of the tower. Those that fail fall 50 feet to the second balcony, where they make a second saving throw. If the second save succeeds, the character catches the second balcony and stops there but takes 5d10 damage from the fall. If the second save fails, the character falls another 50 feet to hit the earthmote at the level of the first balcony and take 10d10 damage. Returning to the combat requires a great deal of stair climbing: 10 squares of difficult terrain if they landed on the second balcony, or 20 squares of difficult terrain if they fell to the ground. Creatures capable of flying fall eight squares before managing to halt themselves, take no falling damage, and are free to fly back into the combat on their turn.



M1. Back Alley Ambush

Encounter Level 25 (41,100 XP)

Setup

2 mithral dragonkin (M)
1 war devil lieutenant (W)
2 assassin devils (A)
10 legion devil legionnaires (L)

The bizarre attacks by the celestial hosts of Bahamut continue, but this time the Platinum Dragon's servants have joined forces with devils from the Nine Hells. The uncommon allies wait to ambush the PCs as they pass through the crowded streets of Methion.

The characters are set up in the small square in the center of the map.

When the heroes enter the area, read:

A modicum of silence descends as you enter a rare pocket of calm amidst the constant commotion of Methion.

Streetwise Check
DC 36: *The Bright City never sleeps, especially the district of Methion, which hums with activity even during the latest hour. Something about this sudden calm doesn't sit right.*

Perception Check
DC 36: *A glint of silver catches your eye as something crouches low to avoid being seen on a nearby rooftop, and the faint rasping of steel being drawn echoes from an alley. Ambush!*

2 Mithral Dragonkin (M) Level 25 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid XP 7,000 each

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +18; see also *dragonborn fury*
HP 234; **Bloodied** 117
AC 39; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 36
Resist 20 radiant
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover), teleport 10

Longspear (standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**
Reach 2; +30 vs. AC; 2d8 + 9 damage and ongoing 10 radiant damage (save ends).

Dimensional Strike (standard; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
The mithral dragonkin teleports 5 squares, makes a *longspear* attack, teleports 5 squares, and makes a *longspear* attack against a different target.

Dragon Breath (standard; encounter) ✦ **Radiant**
Close blast 3; +28 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 9 radiant damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).

Prescient Defense (immediate interrupt, when the mithral dragonkin is hit by an attack; recharge ⚅)
The mithral dragonkin gains a +4 bonus to all defenses against the triggering attack. If the attack misses, the mithral dragonkin teleports 5 squares.

Dragonborn Fury (while bloodied)
The mithral dragonkin gains a +1 racial bonus to attack rolls.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Athletics +27, Insight +19
Str 29 (+21) **Dex** 21 (+17) **Wis** 22 (+18)
Con 26 (+20) **Int** 25 (+19) **Cha** 22 (+18)
Equipment full plate, longspear

10 Legion Devil Legionnaires (L) Level 21 Minion
Medium immortal humanoid (devil) XP 800 each

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 37; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 32; see also *squad defense*
Resist 15 fire
Speed 7, teleport 3

Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+26 vs. AC; 8 damage.

Squad Defense
The legion devil legionnaire gains a +2 bonus to its defenses when adjacent to at least one other legion devil.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Str 14 (+12) **Dex** 12 (+11) **Wis** 12 (+11)
Con 14 (+12) **Int** 10 (+10) **Cha** 12 (+11)
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, longsword

War Devil Lieutenant (W) Level 25 Brute (Leader)
Large immortal humanoid (devil) XP 6,050

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +17; darkvision
HP 286; **Bloodied** 143
AC 38; **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 33
Resist 30 fire
Speed 8, fly 8 (clumsy)

Claw (standard; at-will)
+29 vs. AC; 3d6 + 8 damage.

Trident (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +29 vs. AC; 4d4 + 9 damage and ongoing 5 damage (save ends), and the target slides into any square adjacent to the war devil lieutenant and is knocked prone.

Besieged Foe (minor action; at-will)
Ranged sight; automatic hit; the target is marked, and allies of the war devil lieutenant gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls made against the target until the encounter ends or the war devil lieutenant marks a new target.

Devilish Transposition (move; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
Ranged 20; the war devil lieutenant and an allied devil within range swap positions.

Fiendish Tactics (minor; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
Ranged 10; affects up to 2 allied devils of the war devil lieutenant's level or lower; each target can take a move action or make a basic attack.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Skills Intimidate +20
Str 28 (+21) **Dex** 24 (+19) **Wis** 20 (+17)
Con 26 (+20) **Int** 15 (+14) **Cha** 19 (+16)
Equipment trident

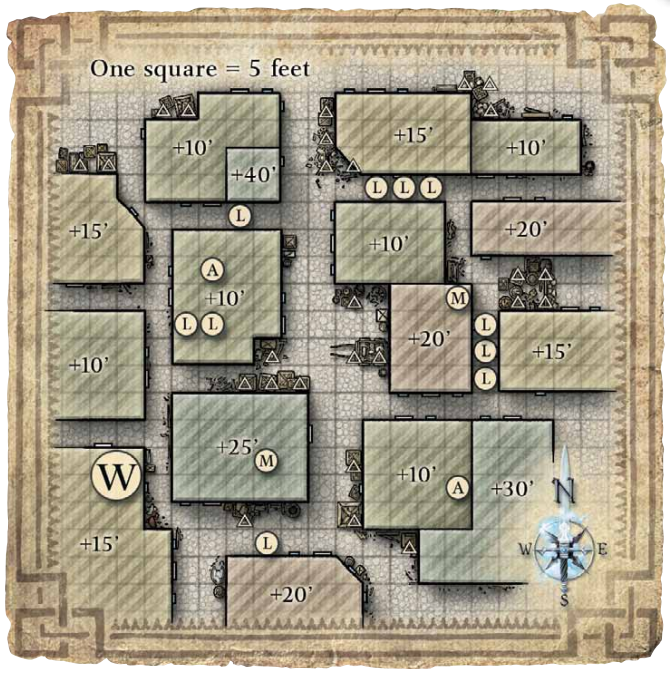
2 Assassin Devils (A)	Level 24 Lurker
Medium immortal humanoid (devil)	XP 6,050 each
Initiative +25	**Senses** Perception +23; darkvision
HP 167; **Bloodied** 83	
AC 38; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 36	
Resist 25 fire	
Speed 12	
⊕ **Shadow Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**	
+27 vs. Fortitude; 3d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).	
↗ **Shadow Net** (standard; recharges when the assassin devil uses *shadow cloak*) ✦ **Necrotic**	
Area burst 2 within 10; +26 vs. Reflex; the target is restrained, is weakened, and takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends all). While a target is affected by *shadow net*, the assassin devil cannot use its *shadow cloak* power.	
Dangerous Shadows	
An assassin devil's *shadow sword* attack deals 4d6 extra necrotic damage against any target granting combat advantage to it.	
Shadow Cloak (standard; recharges when no creatures are affected by *shadow net*) ✦ **Illusion**	
The assassin devil is invisible until it hits or misses with an attack.	
Traitor's Pact	
The assassin devil's necrotic damage is unaffected by Hestavar's radiant affinity.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Stealth +27	
Str 21 (+17)	**Dex** 28 (+21) **Wis** 25 (+19)
Con 17 (+15)	**Int** 17 (+15) **Cha** 13 (+13)
Equipment leather armor, sword	

Tactics

If any of the PCs move to alert their party members, the ambush is sprung. A character that succeeded on either the Streetwise or Perception check can act in the surprise round; others are caught off guard.

The assassin devils use the surprise round to use *shadow net* on a group of the heroes. If one manages to hit a significant number of them, the second instead attacks a vulnerable-looking PC. The two spend the encounter attacking targets they have combat advantage against, throwing their *shadow net* and retreating while invisible to wait for a good opening.

The mithral dragonkin tear into the characters, using their teleportation powers and taking advantage of the differing heights of the buildings to stay clear of reprisals. The war devil lieutenant directs the combat, marking priority targets with *besieged foe*, moving itself or allies into tactically advantageous positions with *devilish transposition*, and pressing the attack with fiendish tactics. It is especially fond of lining up flanks or using its trident to knock foes prone and slide them into the perfect position before using *fiendish tactics* to give the assassin devils extra attacks that benefit from their *dangerous shadows* ability.



Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light.

Barrels and Crates: The larger piles of stacked barrels and crates are difficult terrain and provide cover to those hiding behind them.

Buildings: The buildings are of varying heights, as indicated on the map, and can be scaled with DC 30 Athletics checks. Falling from one of the buildings deals normal damage (1d10 for every 10 feet). The entrances are all locked or barred, and it takes a DC 36 Thievery check to open one.

Wagon: The wagon provides cover to those that clamber into it by spending an additional square of movement. Squeezing under it provides superior cover against attacks originating from above. The wagon is heavy but can be moved at half a hero's speed with a DC 28 Strength check.

M2. Market Day

Encounter Level 24 (34,230 XP)

Setup

1 exalted captain (C)
2 exalted watchmen (W)
10 exalted patrollers (P)

The vast market square teems with activity. Dozens of stalls and carts cater to the tide of citizens browsing or just passing through. A force of Erathis's exalted soldiery patrols the square at all hours, keeping the peace and ensuring thievery remains remarkably uncommon.

The captain, watchmen, and five of the patrollers are currently keeping an eye on things in the square. The other five patrollers are in the vicinity, but they enter the combat at a later time and should not be placed on the map.

There are around three dozen civilians in the square as well, but it is not necessary to mark their exact location; once fighting breaks out, they flee as fast as possible. If the PCs are prepared to recklessly open the fight with area attacks or wish to make the opportunity attacks provoked by fleeing civilians, then place as many as you see fit. Treat the civilians as minions with 22 for all their defenses.

If this is the first seal the characters attack or attempt to open, the exalted soldiers pay them little heed. The heroes are free to engage in conversation and the exalted are friendly enough as long as the seal is not mentioned. Once the PCs reveal their purpose or attempt to break the seal, the exalted soldiers move to block them, but they try to talk the characters down before resorting to violence. The soldiers are not going to let the heroes deface the symbol of their goddess in the heart of her domain, no matter what the PCs might say. If the argument drags on and the characters hesitate in acting, the two exalted watchmen take down two heroes by surprise, triggering the encounter.

If the PCs have attacked or attempted to open any of the other seals, the soldiers shout an alarm and move to intercept as soon as they spot the characters entering the square.

Exalted Captain (C) Level 25 Soldier (Leader)
Medium immortal humanoid (exalted), human XP 7,000

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +17
HP 174; **Bloodied** 87
AC 41; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 36
Resist 10 fire, 10 radiant
Speed 6

⊕ **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+32 vs. AC; 3d8 + 9 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the exalted captain's next turn.

⸸ **Bolstering Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+32 vs. AC; 3d8 + 9 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the exalted captain's next turn and the exalted captain or one ally within 10 squares gains 15 temporary hit points.

Edifying Shout (minor; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
Close burst 5; +28 vs. Will; 1d8 + 6 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the exalted captain's next turn. *Effect:* Allies in the burst gain 10 temporary hit points.

Battlefield Command
Allies gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls against creatures marked by the exalted captain.

Divine Light (minor, only while bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
The exalted captain regains 60 hit points, and the exalted captain and all allies within 5 squares gain a +2 bonus to all defenses until the end of the exalted captain's next turn.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Athletics +27, Insight +17
Str 29 (+21) **Dex** 21 (+17) **Wis** 20 (+17)
Con 26 (+20) **Int** 25 (+19) **Cha** 22 (+18)
Equipment full plate, heavy shield, longsword

2 Exalted Watchmen (W) Level 24 Controller
Medium immortal humanoid (exalted), human XP 4,150 each

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +19
HP 226; **Bloodied** 113
AC 38; **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 37
Resist 10 fire, 10 radiant
Speed 6

⊕ **Truncheon** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+29 vs. AC; 2d10 + 8 damage.

⸸ **Head Crack** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+28 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 8 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the exalted watchman's next turn.

⸸ **Take Down** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+28 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 8 damage, and the target is knocked prone, and is grabbed and restrained (until escape). Attempts to escape the grab take a -5 penalty.

Symbol of Peace
Ranged 10; +28 vs. Will; The target cannot make attacks (save ends).

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Insight +23, Religion +23
Str 20(+17) **Dex** 22(+18) **Wis** 25 (+19)
Con 26(+20) **Int** 19(+16) **Cha** 27(+20)
Equipment leather armor, truncheon

10 Exalted Patrollers (P) Level 24 Minion Soldier
Medium immortal humanoid (exalted), human XP 1,513 each

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +19
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion
AC 40; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 37
Resist 10 fire, 10 radiant
Speed 6

⊕ **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+29 vs. AC; 15 damage.

Riot Control
If an exalted patroller hits a target that is adjacent to at least one other exalted patroller, the target is knocked prone.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Supernal
Str 20 (+17) **Dex** 23 (+18) **Wis** 25 (+19)
Con 23 (+18) **Int** 15 (+14) **Cha** 18 (+16)
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, longsword

Tactics

The exalted captain leads from the front, bolstering allies with his various abilities that grant temporary hit points or other bonuses. He uses *edifying shout* to enhance the survivability of the minions if there are several in range, even if he might not be able to affect many heroes. The watchmen move around the edges of the fight, neutralizing dangerous PCs with *symbol of peace* or employing *take down* on mobile characters. They are fond of using *head crack* on enemies they have grabbed, forcing the enemy to choose between attacking and attempting to escape. The patrollers gang up on heroes to take advantage of *riot control* and to set up flanks.

The exalted are dedicated warriors and fight to the end, confident in their ability to be reborn, to protect their goddess's property, and to stop the "murderous" PCs.

Special

Make a note of whether the characters kill any civilians, because it affects encounter M3.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light.

Carts and Stalls: The carts and stalls found throughout the square count as difficult terrain and provide cover to those standing behind them.

Buildings: The buildings surrounding the square are locked and barred from the inside once violence breaks out.

Symbol of Erathis: The symbol is worked into the flagstones of the square. The soldiers prevent the heroes from doing more than casually inspecting it, so they have no chance to cause much harm to it before the encounter starts.

M3. Last Ditch Defense

Encounter Level 26 (52,256 XP)

Setup

Goran Steelgate (G)
2 Methion guildmasters
12+ Methion citizens

When the PCs attempt to destroy the seal, whether or not they take a short rest after M2, the encounter begins. Only Goran is placed on the map to begin with.

When the characters attempt to open or damage the seal, read:

The massive symbol of Erathis pulses with a brilliant blue light. When it recedes, an elderly dwarf wearing finely-manufactured plate armor and carrying an equally well-crafted hammer can be seen. His eyes pass over the carnage wrought by the previous battle, growing heavy as they take in the destruction. He turns to you with a grim expression: "I hope it's worth the cost, lads. Now's the time to see it through."

On the second round of the combat, one of the guildmasters and six of the citizens enter from the edges of the map. Two rounds later, the second guildmaster and six more citizens enter the fray. Every second round thereafter, 1d6 Methion citizens move in from off the map.

Special

If the heroes killed any of the civilians in encounter M2, then Goran, the guildmasters, and all of the citizens are enraged and gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls.

12+ Methion Citizens		**Level 24 Minion**
Medium immortal humanoid (exalted), human XP 1,513 each		
Initiative +18	**Senses** Perception +19	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion		
AC 38; **Fortitude** 36, **Reflex** 36, **Will** 38		
Resist 10 fire, 10 radiant		
Speed 6		
⊕ **Improvised Weapon** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
+29 vs. AC; 15 damage.		
For Methion! (when reduced to 0 hp)		
The Methion citizen makes an *improvised weapon* attack as a free action.		
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common, Supernal	
Str 20 (+17)	**Dex** 23 (+18)	**Wis** 25 (+19)
Con 23 (+18)	**Int** 15 (+14)	**Cha** 18 (+16)
Equipment improvised weapon		

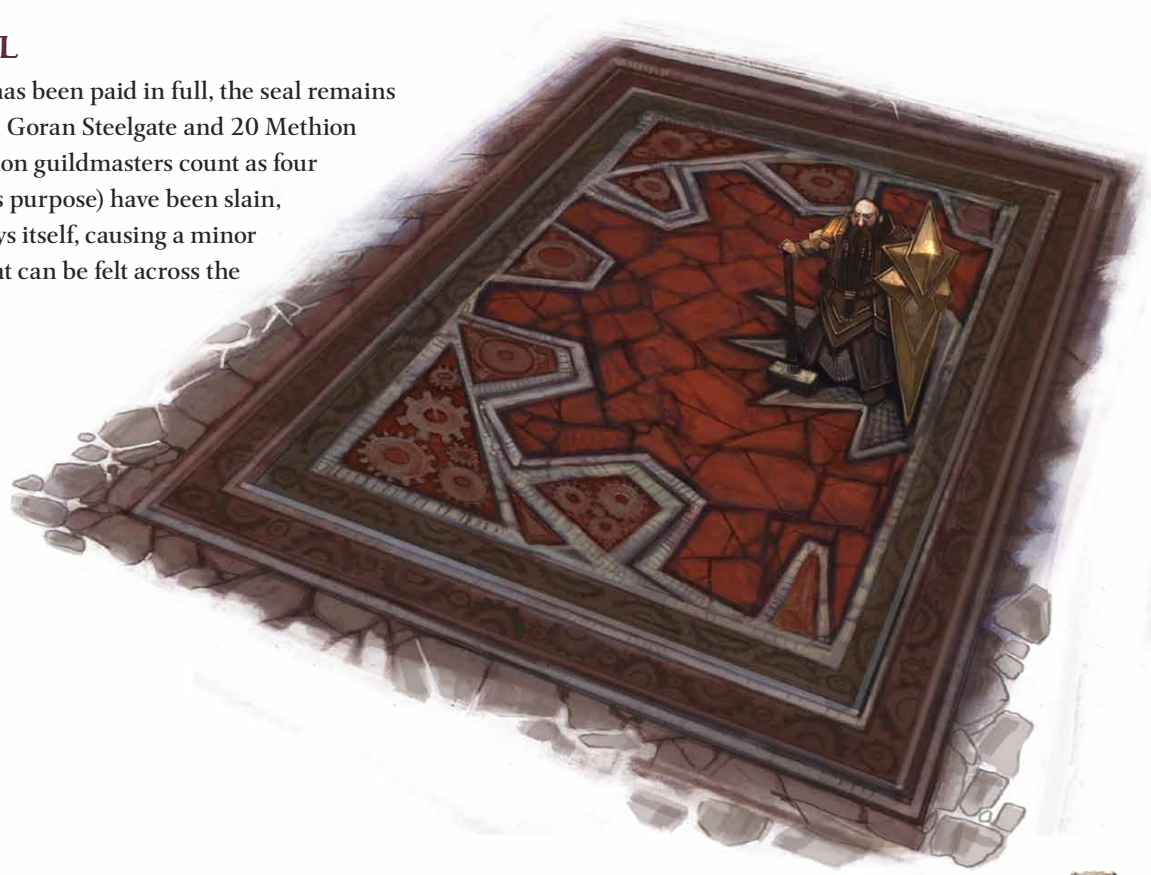
The Seal

Until the cost has been paid in full, the seal remains inviolate. Once Goran Steelgate and 20 Methion citizens (Methion guildmasters count as four citizens for this purpose) have been slain, the seal destroys itself, causing a minor earthquake that can be felt across the earthmote.

Tactics

Goran fights intelligently but ruthlessly, stacking conditions to cripple priority targets and kicking PCs while they're down. The Methion guildmasters and citizens fight as an unorganized mob, ganging up on targets of opportunity. When within Goran's aura, however, they act cooperatively, setting up flanks and shifting to reach advantageous positions.

Goran fights to the bitter end. The civilians only break and run if Goran is slain and the quake caused by breaking the seal occurs (see below).



Goran Steelgate (G) **Level 27 Elite Soldier (Leader)**
Medium immortal humanoid (exalted), dwarf XP 22,000

Initiative +21 **Senses** Perception +21
Cooperative Tactics aura 5; allies within the aura deal 10 extra damage when attacking a target they are flanking and gain a +2 bonus to all defenses when adjacent to another ally.
HP 572; **Bloodied** 236
AC 45; **Fortitude** 45, **Reflex** 39, **Will** 43
Resist 10 fire, 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Warhammer** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+34 vs. AC; 3d8 + 9 damage, and the target is marked until the end of Goran's next turn.

Shield Bash (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+32 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 +9 damage, and the target is knocked prone and dazed (save ends).

Hammer and Anvil (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Goran makes a *warhammer* attack and a *shield bash* attack.

Crucible of Forging (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire, Weapon**
+32 vs. Reflex; 4d10 +9 fire damage, and the target takes ongoing 15 fire damage and takes a -5 penalty to AC (save ends both).

Judgment of Thunder (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Fear, Thunder**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +32 vs. Fortitude; 4d10 + 9 thunder damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Second Wind (minor; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
Goran regains 118 hit points and gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the end of his next turn.

Alignment Good **Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Athletics +27, Insight +17
Str 27 (+21) **Dex** 22 (+19) **Wis** 26 (+21)
Con 31 (+23) **Int** 23 (+19) **Cha** 21 (+18)
Equipment full plate, heavy shield, warhammer

2 Methion Guildmasters **Level 24 Controller**
Medium immortal humanoid (exalted), human XP 4,150 each

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +19
HP 226; **Bloodied** 113
AC 38; **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 37
Resist 10 fire, 10 radiant
Speed 6

⊕ **Forge Hammer** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Weapon**
+29 vs. AC; 2d10 + 8 damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).

Rune of Brittleness (minor; recharges when no targets are suffering the effects)
+28 vs. Reflex; the target takes a -5 penalty to AC, attack rolls, and damage rolls (save ends all). Only one *rune* power may be attempted a turn.

Rune of Weakness (minor; recharges when no targets are suffering the effects)
+28 vs. Fortitude; the target is weakened (save ends). Only one *rune* power may be attempted a turn.

Rune of Reinforcement (minor; at-will)
The Methion guildmaster or an adjacent ally gains a +2 bonus to AC and Fortitude defenses for the remainder of the encounter or until the Methion guildmaster uses the power again. Only one *rune* power may be attempted a turn.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Insight +23, Religion +23
Str 20(+17) **Dex** 22(+18) **Wis** 25 (+19)
Con 26(+20) **Int** 19(+16) **Cha** 27(+20)
Equipment plate armor, forge hammer.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light.

Carts and Stalls: The carts and stalls found throughout the square count as difficult terrain and provide cover to those standing behind them.

Buildings: The buildings surrounding the square are locked and barred from the inside.

Symbol of Erathis: The symbol is worked into the flagstones of the square and has no impact on the tactical encounter.

L0. Unearthing the Library

Encounter Level 24 (12,100 XP)

Setup

Ioun secreted her seal away within the Sealed Library, a structure itself hidden within the fabric of the domain. Trusted scholars and devotees of the goddess that are tasked with conducting sensitive research on their lady's behalf are granted access to the sanctum to pursue their work. A number of doorways lead to and from the library, enabling the scholars within to move about the city and collect whatever materials they might need. Occasionally, creatures devoted to the pursuit of knowledge are shown these secret ways, but only those that have earned the full confidence of Ioun and can be trusted not to reveal what they know.

It is one of these hidden doorways that the characters must seek out if they are to breach the library and open the seal within.

Unearthing the Library **Level 24**
Skill Challenge XP 30,250

Unearthing one of the hidden paths that leads to the Sealed Library is no easy task when it could be anywhere in the massive, bustling, planar metropolis.

Complexity
5 (requires 12 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills
Arcana, Bluff, Intimidate, Perception, Stealth, Streetwise

Secondary Skills
Insight

Victory
The heroes manage to discover one of the secret ways into the Sealed Library.

Defeat
The secrecy of the Sealed Library defeats the PCs; they fail to find a way in. They can try again.

Arcana (DC 29, 1 success, no maximum)
By working out what manner of rare, arcane materials the scholars of the library would need and where they might find them, the character narrows the search.

Bluff (DC 29, 1 success, no maximum)
Through a combination of innocent-seeming questions, enquiring about "special" orders of rare ritualistic ingredients, and posing as one of the cloistered scholars, the hero deduces areas that the scholars might frequent.

Insight (DC 29, 0 successes)
A success on this check does not count as a success for the challenge but does grant a +2 bonus to the next skill check. Likewise, failure does not count as a failure for the challenge but instead imposes a –2 penalty to the next skill check. A success reveals that successful Intimidate checks also generate a failure.
By sounding out people encountered in the city, the PC is able to guide his fellows along the most productive paths.

Intimidate (DC 29, 1 success, 1 failure, no maximum)
Requires a successful Arcana, Bluff, or Streetwise check to unlock. A success on this check counts toward the skill challenge but also generates a failure. A failure on the check generates only a single failure.
Leaning on those that might have had contact with the scholars might yield significant clues, but such strongarm tactics earn no friends.

Perception (DC 29, 1 success, no maximum)
The character searches likely areas, looking for tracks that lead to or from dead ends, rooms with no outlets, and other places that might indicate the presence of a portal.

Stealth (DC 29, 1 success, no maximum)
Slipping into backrooms of book sellers or watching possible locations from the shadows, the hero eliminates some possibilities while finding supporting evidence for others.

Streetwise (DC 29, 1 success, no maximum)
A few cheap ales and a bit of discrete eavesdropping net the PC some interesting stories about secretive mages showing up from nowhere. A few might even be true.

Development

Success allows the characters to uncover one of the hidden doorways leading to the Sealed Library.

Should they fail, their attempts attract the notice of the authorities, and a double strength patrol of exalted soldiery moves in on the heroes. To evade the patrol, the PCs engage in skill challenge H3 (page 17), but they need to achieve 12 successes before 3 failures. This skill challenge is worth 30,250 XP. If the characters fail skill challenge H3, the patrol brings the heroes to battle. The patrol consists of one exalted captain, two exalted watchmen, and eight exalted patrollers (see encounter M2 on page 26 for statistics).

L2. Angry Librarians

Encounter Level 25 (52,256 XP)

Setup

3 library researchers (R)
2 library academics (A)

The scholars working within the Sealed Library don't expect anyone to barge through their hidden doorways, least of all a band of heavily armed adventurers. Two of the researchers, the ones adjacent to the ladders, are high on the sliding ladders searching the shelves for materials. The researcher nearest to the portal is six squares off the ground, the farther one is eight.

The intellectuals who inhabit the library are some of the brightest minds to be found anywhere. While they might be surprised to find the PCs in their sanctum, they have worked out what it is the characters seek and do not hesitate in using force to stop them, especially now that they are so close.

When the heroes enter the library, read:

With a flash of light, you find yourself in what appears to be a well lit and appointed library. Solid tables and plush chairs are scattered about the room, which is dominated by a mirror-still reflecting pool and massive shelves that sweep around the entirety of the room and reach to the ceiling some 40 feet up. Five scholarly-looking individuals, two high in the air upon ladders, look up in surprise as you enter. As the shock wears off, a look of recognition passes over them and they grab for implements kept near at hand.

Perception Check
DC 28: *The ladders seem to be attached to a track near the ceiling.*

3 Library Researchers (R) Level 25 Artillery
Medium immortal humanoid (exalted), human XP 7,000 each

Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +20
HP 175; **Bloodied** 87
AC 37; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 39, **Will** 37
Resist 10 fire, 10 radiant
Speed 6

⊕ **Knock Back** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement**
+30 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 10 damage, and the library researcher pushes the target 3 squares.

Force Barrage (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force, Implement**
Ranged 20; three attacks, each targeting the same or different creatures; +28 vs. Reflex; 2d6 +9 force damage. If a target is hit by two or more of the attacks, the target is knocked prone.

Prism Bomb (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Fear, Implement, Lightning, Poison**
Area burst 2 within 20; each target in the burst is subject to the following attacks:
+28 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 9 poison damage.
+28 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 9 lightning damage.
+28 vs. Will; The target is stunned (save ends).

Cinder Cloud (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fire, Implement, Zone**
Area burst 1 within 10; the library researcher conjures a zone of burning hot cinders. Any creature within the zone when it is conjured, which starts its turn within the zone, or moves into the zone is subject to the following attack: +28 vs. Reflex; 3d10 +9 fire damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends). *Sustain Minor:* The zone persists.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Arcana +25
Str 14 (+14) **Dex** 16 (+15) **Wis** 26 (+20)
Con 19 (+16) **Int** 30 (+22) **Cha** 21 (+17)
Equipment robes, wand

Tactics

The library researchers blast away at the PCs while avoiding melee. They make use of the sliding ladders to keep out of reach of slow-moving combat characters while raining long-range spells upon their foes. The library academics move about to keep heroes suffering from ongoing damage or other conditions within their *litany of sustaining* aura, teleporting to gain favorable positioning or to avoid dangerous situations. The academics and researchers are aware of each other's abilities and plan accordingly, so the academics will attempt to position themselves out of the blast of *prism bomb* and slide targets into a *cinder cloud* or group them up for area attacks.

Secure in the knowledge that they will be revived within Kerith-Ald, the exalted fight to the death.

2 Library Academics (A) Level 25 Controller
Medium immortal humanoid (exalted), eladrin XP 7,000 each

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +19
Litany of Sustaining aura 5; enemies within the aura take a -2 penalty to saves to end ongoing damage or conditions.
HP 233; **Bloodied** 116
AC 39; **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 38
Resist 10 fire, 10 radiant
Speed 6

⊕ **Soporific Touch** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement, Psychic**
+29 vs. Will; 2d10 + 8 psychic damage, and the target is stunned until the end of the library academic's next turn.

Word of Stumbling (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement**
+29 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 9 damage, and the library academic slides the target 3 squares.

Word of Flaying (standard; recharge 6) ✦ **Implement**
+29 vs. Fortitude; 4d10 + 9 damage, and ongoing 15 damage and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and all defenses (save ends all).

Fey Step Mastery (minor; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
The library academic teleports 3 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven, Supernal
Skills Insight +23, Religion +23
Str 14(+14) **Dex** 22(+18) **Wis** 25 (+19)
Con 24(+19) **Int** 30(+22) **Cha** 19(+16)
Equipment robes, rod

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light.

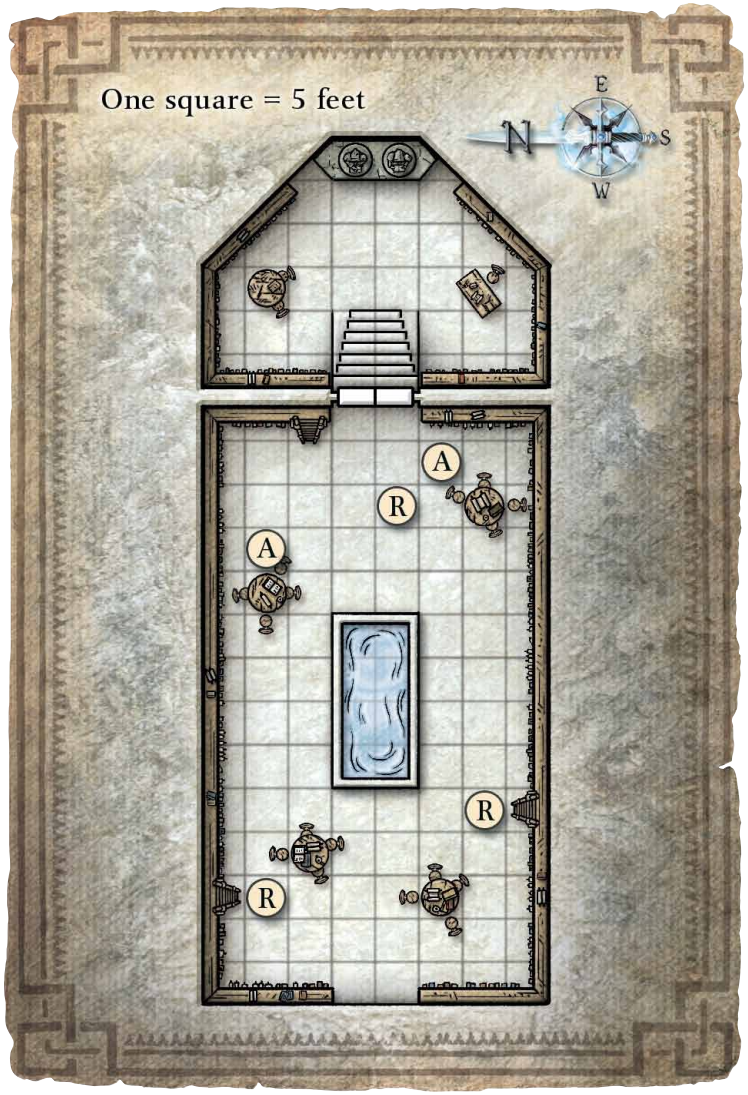
Tables: The heavy wooden tables can be leapt upon by sacrificing a square of movement. Overturning a table requires a DC 28 Strength check, and it then provides cover against attacks originating from the other side.

Plush Chairs: The chairs are large and sturdy, capable of providing cover to creatures sharing their square.

Reflecting Pool: This decorative pool appears to be about 6 feet deep, but that is a trick of perspective. In fact, it is just 6 inches deep and has no effect on movement or combat.

Shelves: The shelves that wrap around the room and reach to the ceiling are crammed with books of all descriptions. Climbing around on the shelves requires a DC 28 Athletics check and allows the climber to move at half speed.

Sliding Ladders: Three ladders are set into a series of enchanted tracks that run along the entire outer edge of the library. Climbing up a ladder is treated as difficult terrain, but moving up or down a stationary ladder requires no check. A creature on a ladder can move it up to 8 squares to the left or right with a move action. Clinging to a moving ladder requires a DC 32 Acrobatics or Athletics check to avoid falling from the speeding contraption. Attacking, being attacked, moving vertically on the ladder, or anything else more involved than simply holding on imposes a –5 penalty to such checks until the end of the distracted creature's next turn. The ladders safely slow and stop moving before impacting with one another unless the moving ladder has moved at least 4 squares and the controlling party wishes it, then the two forcibly slam into each other, moving the rest of the distance desired and forcing the occupants of both ladders to make Acrobatics or Athletics checks to avoid falling. The occupants of the library, having extensive experience, are treated as having a +32 modifier for checks relating to the ladder system.



L3. Headmaster's Charge

Encounter Level 27 (56,104 XP)

Setup

Headmaster Burage (B)
Granosos (G)
8 spell shards

Behind the supremely thick doors of his study, Headmaster Burage is in conversation with the sphinx Granosos. The spell shards are not on the map at the beginning of the encounter.

When the PCs open the doors, read:

A distinguished-looking, elderly man is conversing with a large, feline creature sporting the wings of an eagle. The bizarre but somehow unmistakably female creature turns to face you with timeless eyes that shimmer with the depth of ages. It regards you with a sad but accepting expression. The elderly exalted's expression reflects more rage than acceptance.

On the far wall, flanked by two statues depicting hooded women, is the seal.

Every second round, two spell shards appear in advantageous positions within the library.

Perception Check (Before Opening the Doors)
DC 28 *The massive wooden doors prevent any noise from crossing the threshold.*

Seal

The seal remains unharmed by attempts to damage it until Headmaster Burage has been slain and Granosos has either also been killed or has quit the battlefield, at which point the seal splits down the center with a thunderous crack.

Headmaster Burage (B)	**Level 27 Elite Controller**
Medium immortal humanoid (exalted), human	XP 22,000
Initiative +16	**Senses** Perception +21
HP 518; **Bloodied** 259	
AC 44; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 42, **Will** 42	
Resist 10 fire, 10 radiant	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 6, teleport 5	
Action Points 1	
Caning (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement**	
+32 vs. AC; 2d8 + 9 damage, and the target is dazed and takes a -2 to attack rolls (saves ends both).	
Chastisement (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fear, Implement**	
Ranged 10; +31 vs. Will; 3d8 + 9 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).	
Headmaster's Wrath (standard; at-will)	
Headmaster Burage makes two basic attacks.	
Telekinetic Hurl (standard; recharges when Headmaster Burage hits with a basic attack)	
Close burst 5; targets one creature in burst; +31 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 9 damage, and Headmaster Burage slides the target 5 squares and the target is knocked prone.	
Leaping Polymorph (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Polymorph**	
Ranged 10; +31 vs. Fortitude; the target becomes a Tiny animal (save ends). While in this form, the target cannot use powers or make attacks. *Aftereffect:* One of the target's allies within 10 squares suffers the following attack: +31 vs. Fortitude; the target becomes a Tiny animal (save ends). While in this form the target cannot use powers or make attacks.	
Startling Displacement (immediate interrupt, when Headmaster Burage is hit with an attack; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Teleportation**	
Headmaster Burage swaps places with one creature within 5 squares. The triggering attack hits this creature instead.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Arcana +25	
Str 15 (+15)	**Dex** 16 (+16) **Wis** 27 (+21)
Con 25 (+20)	**Int** 32 (+24) **Cha** 21 (+18)
Equipment robes, rod	

Granosos (G) **Level 27 Elite Brute**
Large immortal magical beast, sphinx XP 22,000
Initiative +21 **Senses** Perception +29; low-light vision
HP 672; **Bloodied** 336
AC 40; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 40, **Will** 42
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, fly 6 (hover)
Action Points 1

Ancient Claws (standard; at-will)
+30 vs. AC; 4d10 + 8 damage.

Bite of Ages (standard; at-will)
+30 vs. AC; 2d10 + 8 damage, and the target is knocked prone and immobilized (save ends).

Fury of Ages (standard; at-will)
Granosos makes an *ancient claws* and a *bite of ages* attack. If both hit the same target, the target is weakened (save ends).

Primordial Riddle (minor; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 10; Granosos compels the target to contemplate a riddle. The target is dazed until the end of the encounter or until it answers the riddle. To determine the answer, a creature must spend a minor action and succeed at a DC 28 History check. A target that does not attempt to answer the riddle during its turn takes 3d8 psychic damage at the end of its turn. An ally can provide the answer and end the effect. If an ally ends the effect, the target takes 3d8 psychic damage.

Sands of Time (immediate interrupt, when Granosos is hit with an attack; recharges when a creature takes damage from *primordial riddle*)
Granosos gains a +4 bonus to all defenses against the triggering attack. If the triggering attack still hits, Granosos takes only half damage.

Great Roar (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Thunder**
Close blast 5; +26 vs. Fortitude; 5d10 + 10 thunder damage, and the target is pushed 5 squares and is knocked prone.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Dwarven, Elven, Primordial, Supernal
Skills Insight +30
Str 29 (+22) **Dex** 27 (+21) **Wis** 32 (+24)
Con 28 (+22) **Int** 31 (+23) **Cha** 32 (+24)

Spell Shard **Level 24 Minion Artillery**
Medium immortal animate XP 1,513 each
Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +20
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion; see also *energy release*.
AC 36; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 37
Speed 2, fly 12 (hover)

Origin Spell (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Force, Lightning, or Thunder**
When created, the spell shard knows one of the following attacks, determined randomly:
1—Ranged 10; +29 vs. Reflex: ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).
2—Ranged 10; +29 vs. Reflex; 15 force damage.
3—Two attacks; ranged 10; +29 vs. Reflex; 10 lightning damage.
4—Area burst 1 within 10; +29 vs. Reflex; 10 thunder damage.

Energy Release (when the spell shard drops to 0 hit points)
The spell shard makes an *origin spell* attack as a free action.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Supernal
Str 12 (+13) **Dex** 23 (+18) **Wis** 27 (+20)
Con 23 (+18) **Int** 12 (+13) **Cha** 23 (+18)

Tactics

Headmaster Burage teleports around the battlefield, alternating between smashing characters into each other with *telekinetic hurl* and lashing out with *headmaster's fury*. He is inordinately fond of *leaping polymorph* and normally uses it against the heroes with the highest damage output. He saves *startling displacement* for dangerous-looking attacks or those that attach debilitating conditions.

Granosos fights very calmly and methodically, shifting about the battle to bring her *fury of ages* to bear where it will do the most good. She normally focuses both attacks on a single PC, but will split them if it is advantageous or avoids reprisals. She uses *primordial riddle* against as many characters as possible, both to hinder her enemies and to recharge *sands of time*. She will swap move actions for *primordial riddle* if moving isn't to her advantage. Granosos unleashes her *great roar* when several enemies are in its blast.

The spell shards hurl their *origin spell* at the heroes, targeting whichever spell they know to the maximum effect. Given the choice between not casting and risking destruction, they choose to continue casting; their *energy release* guarantees something gets off even if they fall.

The battle may spill into area L1; Burage is likely to teleport between the areas at least a few times during the fight to gain a better position for his attacks, and Granosos fights wherever she gains the best advantage. She slowly works her way toward the portal in L1 if the battle begins turning against her. Neither combatant is inclined to use the sliding ladders, but Burage might if he sees an advantage. The PCs could always decide to have fun with them. Refer back to the features of area L1 if it comes up.

Headmaster Burage and the spell shards all fight to the death. Granosos is less vested in the struggle and will cede the battlefield and retreat if Burage is slain and she is bloodied.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light.

Table: The heavy wooden table can be leapt upon by sacrificing a square of movement. Overturning it requires a DC 28 Strength check, and it then provides cover against attacks originating from the other side.

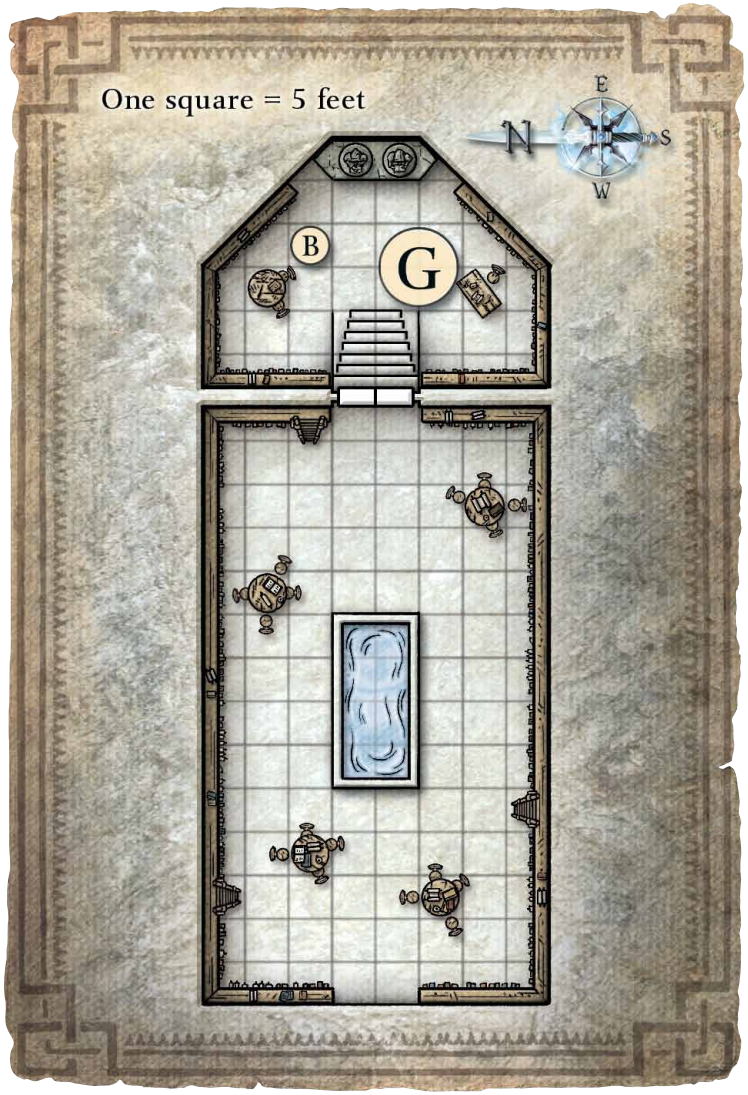
Plush Chairs: The chairs are large and sturdy, capable of providing cover to creatures sharing their square.

Shelves: The shelves that wrap around the room and reach to the ceiling are crammed with books of all descriptions. Climbing around on the shelves requires a DC 28 Athletics check and allows the climber to move at half speed.

Headmaster's Desk: This solid desk can be mounted at the cost of a square of movement. It provides cover to those sheltering behind it.

Statues: The two statues flanking the seal depict Ioun. They are normal statues.

Seal: The stone seal carved into the wall has no effect on the tactical encounter. Attempts to attack it directly fail to cause any damage until the proper conditions are met (see above).



S1. Raging Storm

Encounter Level 28 (65,000 XP)

Setup

Nakheten (N)

Place Nakheten where indicated. The characters should be scattered about the opposite side of the encounter area, near the swirling wall of water. Regardless of whether the heroes flew through the storm or travelled on the water, they are tossed by the violent conditions into the heaving lagoon before being spat out into the encounter. If the PCs manage to arrive in some other fashion, adjust the following accordingly:

When the characters arrive, read:

The churning water of the lagoon roars as waves rise into a wall of crushing, swirling water, hurling you like rag dolls into an area of the lagoon bed somehow devoid of water. The thundering wall of water rotates around the dry bed with crushing force as the insane rage of the storm plays out above. A titanic creature roars in concert with the storm, its rumbling bellows drowning out even the thunder. Its form seems roughly hewn from shale; brilliant, crackling blue-white lights shine forth from cracks and joints in its body and a billowing cloud of steam and lightning streams from its crown. As it turns to regard you, unending, ageless rage burns deeply in eye-like voids and a thundering howl of fury bursts from blazing, blue-white furnace of its mouth.

The final seal, a flat disk of dull metal inscribed with the combined symbols of Erathis, Ioun, and Pelor, is sunk deep into the rocky flesh of its chest.

Acrobatics Check

Each hero; DC 32: PCs that succeed are placed on the map normally. Those that fail begin the battle prone.

Nakheten, the Raging Storm (N) — **Level 28 Solo Brute**

Huge elemental humanoid (aquatic, giant) — XP 65,000

Initiative +21 — **Senses** Perception +29; low-light vision

Tempest Fury (Lightning, Thunder) aura 10; any creature that enters or begins its turn in the aura takes 15 lightning and thunder damage; creatures other than Nakheten treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain and cannot fly.

HP 1,310; **Bloodied** 655

AC 41; **Fortitude** 44, **Reflex** 39, **Will** 40

Resist 30 lightning, 30 thunder

Saving Throws +5

Speed 8, fly 10 (hover), swim 8

Action Points 2

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)

Reach 2; +31 vs. AC; 2d12 + 11 damage.

Call Lightning (standard; at-will)

Close burst 10; one target in burst; +29 vs. Reflex; 3d12 + 11 lightning damage.

Titanic Fury (standard; at-will)

Nakheten makes a *slam* attack against each enemy within reach. It also makes one *call lightning* attack.

Lightning Storm (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Lightning**

Close burst 10; + 27 vs. Reflex; 5d10 + 11 lightning damage. If the attack hits only a single target, that target takes an additional 5d10 lightning damage and is dazed (save ends).

Storm Blood (immediate interrupt, when an enemy hits Nakheten with a melee attack; at-will) ✦ **Lightning, Thunder**

Reach 3; targets the triggering enemy; +29 vs. Reflex; 2d12 + 11 lightning and thunder damage.

Howling Winds (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Thunder**

Close burst 5; +27 vs. Fortitude; 5d10 + 11 thunder damage, and the target is pushed 5 squares and is knocked prone.

Alignment Unaligned — **Languages** Common, Dwarven, Elven, Primordial, Supernal

Skills Insight +30

Str 34 (+26)	**Dex** 23 (+21)	**Wis** 20 (+19)
Con 30 (+24)	**Int** 15 (+16)	**Cha** 23 (+20)

Tactics

Nakheten is not a subtle combatant. Its rage at its eons-long confinement is boundless, and it seizes the chance to vent its fury upon the characters. Nakheten charges headlong into combat, smashing about itself with *titanic fury*. The titan does not normally reserve powers, preferring to unleash its limited or rechargeable abilities as soon as possible. Nakheten's rage is endless; the titan fights to the death.

Seal

When Nakheten falls, the seal embedded in its chest crumbles into dark ash before being blown away on the faltering winds of the dying storm. As it does so, the *Arrow of Fate*, long hidden within, becomes visible. An almost tangible release of power pulses from the collapsing seal as the ancient rituals bound to it begin to unravel, washing over the heroes, refreshing and empowering them just as a short rest would. The PCs have just enough time to grab the *Arrow* before the whirling water of the lagoon crashes down to reclaim its bed.

Features of the Area

Illumination: While the dense, black clouds of the raging storm block out the sunlight that blankets Hestavar, the near constant flashes of lightning provide a harsh, flickering equivalent to Bright light.

Wall of Water: The roaring wall of water churns about Nekheten's prison, driven by the titan's fury. Nekheten, contained by the power of the seal, cannot pass or be forced to pass the standing stones and enter the water. Characters that enter the churning wall for any reason take 3d10 damage, are slid 6 squares clockwise around the edge of the wall, and are knocked prone in a square adjacent to the wall.

Standing Stones: Each of these riblike spurs of stone bears an engraved symbol of Erathis, Ioun, or Pelor upon its surface.

Seal: The dull metal seal embedded in Nekheten's chest is impervious to damage while the titan lives (see above).

S2. Guionne's Betrayal

Encounter Level 26 (51,150 XP)

Setup

Guionne (G)
2 cherubium (C)
1 war devil lieutenant (W)
1 assassin devil (A)
2 shocktroop devil line breakers (S)
10 legion devil legionnaires (L)

Guionne and the devils are in the positions indicated. The assassin devil is invisible and concealing itself with Stealth; do not place it on the map until the heroes notice it or it attacks.

The PCs are set up along the shore.

When the characters enter the area, read:

The crashing surf deposits you like so much flotsam on the shore of a small island, your path narrowly avoiding the razor-sharp spurs of rock that dot the lagoon nearby. The familiar, cheerful voice of Guionne calls out: "Ah, my friends! I am so delighted that you were as good as your word and managed to retrieve the arrow." Guionne breathes deeply, savoring the feel. "Can't you feel it in the air? The city is already feeling so much more hospitable, and we have you to thank for it. Now ... I need the artifact."

Guionne is perfectly willing to let the heroes go if they give him the *Arrow*. He allows the PCs to pick themselves up and brush off the sand, but if the characters make a threatening move or delay too long, he orders the devils to attack.

Perception Check
DC 37: *A faint rustling, the sound of something moving stealthily, catches your attention, seeming to originate from the empty air. Perhaps the air isn't as empty as you thought.*

10 Legion Devil Legionnaires (L) **Level 21 Minion**
Medium immortal humanoid (devil) XP 800 each

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 37; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 32; see also *squad defense*
Resist 15 fire
Speed 7, teleport 3

Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+26 vs. AC; 8 damage.

Squad Defense
The legion devil legionnaire gains a +2 bonus to its defenses when adjacent to at least one other legion devil.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Str 14 (+12) **Dex** 12 (+11) **Wis** 12 (+11)
Con 14 (+12) **Int** 10 (+10) **Cha** 12 (+11)
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, longsword

Guionne (G) **Level 26 Elite Controller**
Medium immortal humanoid (devil) XP 18,000

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +18
HP 502; **Bloodied** 251
AC 43; **Fortitude** 38, **Reflex** 41, **Will** 41
Resist 25 fire
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, teleport 6
Action Points 1

Backhand (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+31 vs. AC; 2d8 + 9 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares and dazed (saves ends).

Acid Bolt (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid, Implement**
Ranged 10; +30 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 9 acid damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of Guionne's next turn.

Molten Wave (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Fire, Implement**
Close blast 5; +28 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 9 fire damage, and ongoing 15 fire damage (save ends).

Wall of Burning Iron (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Conjuration, Fire, Implement**
Area wall 10 within 10 squares. Guionne conjures a wall of red-hot iron covered in wicked barbs. The wall blocks movement, line of sight, and line of effect. Creatures that end their turn adjacent to the wall take 10 fire damage. Creatures that touch the wall or are pulled, pushed, or slid into the wall take 10 damage and 10 fire damage. The wall is 3 squares high, can be climbed with a DC 29 Athletics check (creatures climbing or standing on the wall take 10 damage and 10 fire damage for touching it), and cannot be destroyed. *Sustain Minor:* The wall persists.

Iron Spike (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Fire, Implement**
Range 5; Target must be within 2 squares of the wall conjured with *wall of burning iron*; +31 vs. AC; 4d10 + 9 damage, and ongoing 15 fire damage and the target is immobilized (save ends both).

Cherubium Conduit
Guionne can channel any of his powers with the implement keyword through one of his cherubium that is within 20 squares, treating the cherubium's square as his own for purposes of the ability (line of sight, line of effect, range, origin squares, and so on). Guionne does not need line of sight or line of effect to the cherubium.

Spawn Cherubium (minor, at-will)
Guionne takes 15 damage and creates a cherubium in an adjacent square. The cherubium enters the initiative count immediately after Guionne and can act normally the turn it is created. Guionne cannot control more than two cherubium at a time; creating a new cherubium while he has two active destroys one of the preexisting cherubium.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Arcana +25
Str 21 (+18) **Dex** 22 (+19) **Wis** 21 (+18)
Con 25 (+20) **Int** 28 (+22) **Cha** 27 (+21)
Equipment rod

Tactics

The devils fight a coordinated battle, led by Guionne and the war devil lieutenant. Guionne uses *wall of burning iron* to order the field in favor of the devils, isolating or redirecting melee heroes while trapping ranged or support characters in unfavorable melees. He attacks through his cherubium, preferring to remain well clear of any possible danger to his person. The war devil lieutenant guides the flow of the combat with his abilities, focusing his *fiendish tactics* on shocktrooper devil line breakers, if they are at full hit points and have multiple targets for their *shocktroop attack*, and the assassin devil, if it has combat advantage against a target. The shocktrooper devil line breakers and legion devil legionnaires charge forward to prevent the PCs from targeting their less-well-defended allies and from assisting other characters. The shocktrooper devil line breakers actively seek to engage multiple targets at the opening of the encounter. The assassin devil moves about the rear of the engagement, targeting back rank characters and avoiding defenders.

The devils have no way of fleeing Hestavar and fight ferociously if the fight turns against them. Guionne, on the other hand, can quit the city and will run if the majority of the devils are down and he is severely injured.

2 Cherubium (C) **Level 26 Minion**
Medium immortal animate (devil) XP 2,250 each

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +19
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion; see also *death burst*.
AC 39; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 36, **Will** 36
Resist 25 fire
Speed 2, fly 12 (hover)

⊕ **Needling Teeth** (standard; at-will)
+30 vs. AC; 15 damage.

↯ **Sweet Disposition** (immediate interrupt, when a creature targets the cherubium with an attack; at-will)
Range sight; targets the triggering creature; +28 vs. Will; the target cannot attack the cherubium until the start of its next turn. The target is free to target a different creature with the attack. This power does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Supernal
Str 8 (+12) **Dex** 26 (+21) **Wis** 21 (+18)
Con 22 (+19) **Int** 15 (+15) **Cha** 27 (+21)

Assassin Devil (A) **Level 24 Lurker**
Medium immortal humanoid (devil) XP 6,050

Initiative +25 **Senses** Perception +23; darkvision
HP 167; **Bloodied** 83
AC 38; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 36
Resist 25 fire
Speed 12

⊕ **Shadow Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
+27 vs. Fortitude; 3d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

↯ **Shadow Net** (standard; recharges when the assassin devil uses *shadow cloak*) ✦ **Necrotic**
Area burst 2 within 10; +26 vs. Reflex; the target is restrained, is weakened, and takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends all). While a target is affected by *shadow net*, the assassin devil cannot use its *shadow cloak* power.

Dangerous Shadows
An assassin devil's *shadow sword* attack deals 4d6 extra necrotic damage against any target granting combat advantage to it.

Shadow Cloak (standard; recharges when no creatures are affected by *shadow net*) ✦ **Illusion**
The assassin devil is invisible until it hits or misses with an attack.

Traitor's Pact
The assassin devil's necrotic damage is unaffected by Hestavar's radiant affinity.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Stealth +27
Str 21 (+17) **Dex** 28 (+21) **Wis** 25 (+19)
Con 17 (+15) **Int** 17 (+15) **Cha** 13 (+13)
Equipment leather armor, sword

War Devil Lieutenant (W) **Level 25 Brute (Leader)**
Large immortal humanoid (devil) XP 7,000

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +17; darkvision
HP 286; **Bloodied** 143
AC 38; **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 33
Resist 30 fire
Speed 8, fly 8 (clumsy)

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
+29 vs. AC; 3d6 + 8 damage.

⊕ **Trident** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +29 vs. AC; 4d4 + 9 damage and ongoing 5 damage (save ends), and the target slides into any square adjacent to the war devil lieutenant and is knocked prone.

↯ **Besieged Foe** (minor action; at-will)
Ranged sight; automatic hit; the target is marked, and allies of the war devil lieutenant gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls made against the target until the encounter ends or the war devil lieutenant marks a new target.

↯ **Devilish Transposition** (move; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
Ranged 20; the war devil lieutenant and an allied devil within range swap positions.

↯ **Fiendish Tactics** (minor; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
Ranged 10; affects up to 2 allied devils of the war devil lieutenant's level or lower; each target can take a move action or make a basic attack.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Skills Intimidate +20
Str 28 (+21) **Dex** 24 (+19) **Wis** 20 (+17)
Con 26 (+20) **Int** 15 (+14) **Cha** 19 (+16)
Equipment trident

2 Shocktroop Devil Line Breakers (S)	Level 24 Soldier
Large immortal humanoid (devil)	XP 6,050 each
Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +9; darkvision	
HP 219; **Bloodied** 109	
AC 41; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 34; see also *Asmodeus's shield*	
Resist 15 fire	
Speed 6, fly 8	
⊕ **Sword and Shield** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Reach 2; +31 vs. AC; 3d6 + 8 damage, and the shocktroop devil line breaker makes a secondary attack. *Secondary Attack:* Reach 2; +28 vs. Fortitude; the target is pushed 2 squares and dazed until the end of the shocktroop devil line breaker's next turn.	
⸸ **Shocktroop Attack** (standard; recharges when the shocktroop devil line breaker has full hit points)	
The devil makes three *sword and shield* attacks, each against a different target.	
Asmodeus's Shield	
While a shocktroop devil line breaker is not bloodied, it gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against divine attack powers. While bloodied, it takes a -2 penalty to all defenses against divine attack powers.	
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Supernal	
Str 24 (+20) **Dex** 24 (+19) **Wis** 17 (+15)	
Con 23 (+18) **Int** 14 (+14) **Cha** 24 (+19)	
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, longsword	

Features of the Area

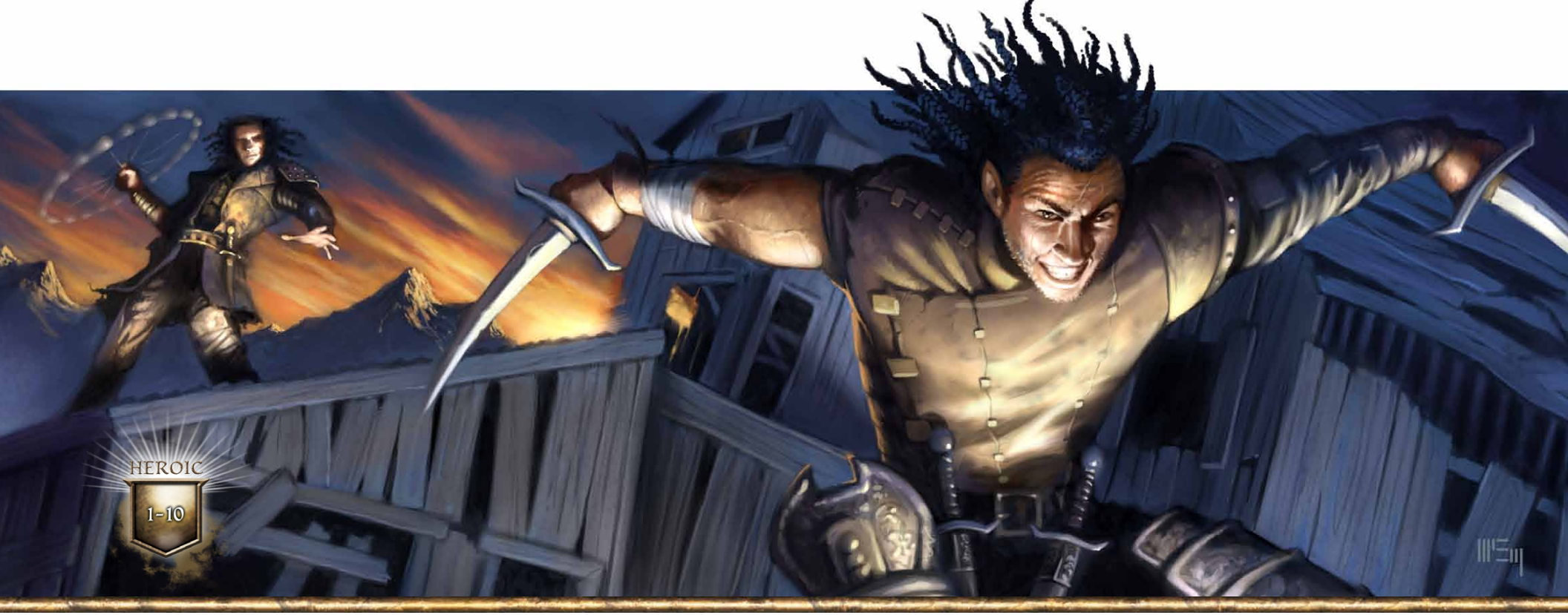
Illumination: Bright light.

Rocky Cliffs: The majority of the small island consists of a jagged stone outcropping that juts from the sea and surrounds the small area of open sand. Climbing around on the sharp rocks requires a DC 36 Athletics check and is done at one-quarter normal speed.

Water: The lagoon water is relatively shallow here but does count as difficult terrain.

Razor-Edged Rocks: The rock pillars sticking out of the lagoon are dangerously sharp. A creature pulled, pushed, or slid into or through a rock pillar square takes 15 damage. Such squares are difficult terrain and provide cover as normal pillars.

Storm Surge: Powerful waves, driven by the faltering storm, regularly crash into the small island. At the start of each turn, roll a d6; on a 5 or 6, a particularly energetic wave hits. Creatures within d6 squares of the lagoon's edge are subject to the following attack: + 26 vs. Reflex; the target is knocked prone and slides 1d6 squares straight into the lagoon.



A Chaos Scar Adventure

The Brothers Gray

By Greg A. Vaughan

illustrations by Patrick McEvoy ✦ cartography by Sean Macdonald

"The Brothers Gray" is a short adventure for five 1st-level characters that takes place in the Chaos Scar, near the King's Wall. "The Brothers Gray" takes the PCs into the ruins of an abandoned mining outpost, where they must contend with a trio of murderous halflings. If you're not playing a Chaos Scar campaign, you can still use this adventure by integrating it into any existing campaign situated near a wilderness area that had mining operations at some point in the past.

For details on the Chaos Scar and its environs, read the Chaos Scar introduction and check out the map of the entire valley.

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Background

The Brothers Gray is a gang of cutthroats and murderers led by a trio of villainous halfling brothers—Finneus, Lambert, and Moseley Graybairn. The depraved brothers prey upon those homesteads and travelers that venture too near the valley of the Chaos Scar. Survivors have been few and far between, and an entire posse of guardsmen sent from a nearby barony disappeared without a trace while following the halflings' trail toward the valley. (Whether these disappearances were due to an ambush by Brothers or other monsters wandering free of the valley is not known.) Whatever the case, as long as the Brothers Gray can strike targets with impunity and melt back into the hostile wilderness, their depredations are likely to continue.

Adventure Synopsis

The nearby constabulary is not the only group with an interest in seeing the Brothers Gray gang permanently disbanded. The success of the gang lies not only in the bloodthirstiness of its members to ward away intruders but in the security of their hideout. Through intimidation, negotiation, and blind luck, the gang has managed to forge a truce with other denizens of the valley—most recently the halfling priestess of Torog, Morgana—and locate an abandoned and well-concealed mine from which they can plan their raids and retreat back to rest and recuperate.

The Brothers Gray have lived in their mine stronghold for a couple of months now and have grown confident in its secrecy and the dangers of the surrounding area to ward off pursuers. As such, they have become lax in their vigilance, and the party has the opportunity to catch the majority of the gang off guard. From there, the heroes can head into the old mine structure and encounter two of the three halfling brothers. If the PCs are perceptive, they will note that not all the gang members are present—one of the brothers is missing—and will have the opportunity to ambush the returning brother and his compatriots when they arrive home from a scouting mission. If the party doesn't take precautions, though, then they find themselves ambushed in turn.

Finally, the old mine works that the gang inhabits provides opportunities for future exploration in the form of an old, seemingly bottomless mine shaft and a mysterious tunnel that departs from it as a secretly cut drift.

Getting the Heroes Involved

"The Brothers Gray" takes place in the Chaos Scar. You can use one of the hooks below to get the PCs into the valley and to the mine works. These hooks also come with a minor quest that, if completed, can net the PCs some extra experience.

Hook 1: Kobold Plea

In the process of making a name for themselves in the valley, the Brothers Gray haven't made allies of all their neighbors. In one case in particular, they stepped on the toes of a local tribe of kobolds, the Fireclaw Clan. The kobolds are a cowardly lot and have been keeping an eye out for someone who might help rid them of the Brothers Gray, who ambushed and killed three of their weaker members. The kobolds are now convinced the Brothers Gray are very powerful and fear to cross them. If the heroes have already defeated some foes in the Chaos Scar, the kobolds send an emissary to ask for their aid in defeating the brothers. The kobolds are hungry for vengeance, and are willing to trade information about points of interest deeper in the valley in exchange for the heads of the brothers.

Quest XP: 100 XP for each halfling brother the heroes slay.

Murder!

The reason the nearby barony sent guards after the brothers is more than just a general interest in preserving the peace. The Brothers Gray ambushed a merchant caravan leaving the barony just a few weeks ago, and killed everyone traveling with the merchant.

The merchant was actually a cousin to the baron, and he wants his kinsman's killers brought to justice. The baron has put a bounty on the heads of the killers, and will reward the PCs via an emissary if they show proof that the deed is done.

Quest XP: 100 XP and 50 gp for each halfling brother the heroes slay.

Treasure Preparation

"The Brothers Gray" uses the treasure parcel system described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The PCs should gain a total of three treasure parcels in this adventure. Listed below are the most likely places to find parcels and what those treasure parcels might consist of. The magic items should come from the players' wish lists.

Parcel 1: Bandit Encampment	200 gp
Parcel 2: Upper Works	100-gp gem and 200 sp
Parcel 3: Homecoming	Magic item, level 5

Getting Started

If the PCs do any research into the Brothers Gray, they can uncover the following information with the appropriate skill checks:

History (DC 10): The Brothers Gray gang is notorious for its bloodthirsty and merciless raids on isolated farmsteads and small groups of travelers. They're number anywhere from a half dozen to ten or more, and it's said they use an old mine works as their base of operations.

History (DC 15): The Brothers Gray gang is named for its leaders, halfling brothers named Graybairn, orphaned from a troll raid on a distant village years ago. They're said to be completely insane—overcome with bloodlust for their lost family and friends whose deaths they blame on a nearby baron who did not defend their village.

Streetwise (DC 10): No one is sure exactly how many halfling brothers there are. Some say the gang is nothing more than a single halfling using multiple disguises, while others claim the band is led by twins.

Streetwise (DC 15): The halflings are actually a trio, but they lead a group of other bandits, who follow them thanks to the profitability of the brothers' attacks—and because the halflings have cowed the rest of their band through their sheer ferocity.

When the heroes are ready to begin, read the following aloud:

The Brothers Gray have terrorized the region for the last time. In the distance, and still within sight of the King's Wall, you see the rundown remains of a mine complex—exactly as described. This must be it.

Ties to Other Adventures in the Scar

As mentioned, Morgana from "Den of the Slave-Takers" (*Dungeon* #171) might have fled here if the PCs failed to capture or kill her after playing that adventure. If that's the case, you can use her in "The Brothers Gray" in a couple of interesting places.

If the heroes are trouncing the brothers in encounter G2, Morgana could be concealed in the upper level of the mine works near the massive winch.

Otherwise, perhaps Morgana accompanied Moseley. This makes an already difficult encounter (due to Moseley's level) much more treacherous, so do this only with an experienced or well-rested group.

G1. Bandit Encampment

Encounter Level 1 (550 XP)

1 human bandit (B)
4 human rabble (R)
1 goblin sharpshooter (G)

Setup

Once the PCs have learned the location of the mine encampment of the Brothers Gray gang, they can seek out the bandits. How the party approaches is up to the players, but the following description assumes that the PCs approach after nightfall when the bandits are least active and that they take measures to be stealthy in their approach. If they choose to do otherwise, modify the description accordingly.

While the bandits in the camp are not particularly alert, the goblin sharpshooter atop the mine's roof is. His passive Perception check is 12. If the PCs beat that with their Stealth checks, they can approach the camp unnoticed all the way to the edge of the map. The bandits in the camp are not alert and can be easily surprised.

The adventurers cannot initially see the human bandit, the human rabble by the stream, or the goblin sharpshooter.

As the adventurers reach the edge of the woods at the base of the canyon wall, read:

Firelight flickers through the trees ahead. Built against the side of the canyon is a ramshackle mining operation, its head frame and hoist house built onto a wide ledge above and formerly powered by a water wheel in a stream-fed pool. Rickety stairs climb the outside of this structure. At its base a group of bedrolls have been laid out around a campfire. Three rough-looking men lounge about and talk among themselves.

Human Bandit (B) **Level 2 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid XP 125

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +1
HP 37; **Bloodied** 18
AC 16; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12
Speed 6

Mace (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+4 vs. AC; 1d8 + 1 damage, and the human bandit shifts 1 square.

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 5/10; +6 vs. AC; 1d4 + 3 damage.

Dazing Strike (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires mace; +4 vs. AC; 1d8 + 1 damage, the target is dazed until the end of the human bandit's next turn, and the human bandit shifts 1 square.

Combat Advantage
The human bandit deals an extra 1d6 damage on melee and ranged attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +9, Streetwise +7, Thievery +9
Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+2)
Equipment leather armor, mace, 4 daggers

4 Human Rabble (R) **Level 2 Minion**
Medium natural humanoid XP 31

Initiative +1 **Senses** Perception +1
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 15; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 11, **Will** 11, see also *mob rule*
Speed 6

Club (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+6 vs. AC; 4 damage.

Mob Rule
The human rabble gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses while at least two other human rabble are within 5 squares of it.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 10 (+1) **Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 12 (+1) **Int** 9 (-1) **Cha** 11 (+0)
Equipment club

Goblin Sharpshooter (G) **Level 2 Artillery**
Small natural humanoid XP 125

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +2; low-light vision
HP 31; **Bloodied** 15
AC 16; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 11
Speed 6; see also *goblin tactics*

Short Sword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 2 damage.

Hand Crossbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 10/20; +9 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage

Sniper
When a goblin sharpshooter makes a ranged attack from hiding and misses, it is still considered to be hiding.

Combat Advantage
The goblin sharpshooter deals an extra 1d6 damage against any target it has combat advantage against.

Goblin Tactics (Immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)
The goblin shifts 1 square.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Goblin
Skills Stealth +12, Thievery +12
Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 18 (+5) **Wis** 13 (+2)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 8 (+0) **Cha** 8 (+0)
Equipment leather armor, short sword, hand crossbow with 20 bolts, pocket flask of whiskey

Perception Check

DC 10: *A precariously leaning outhouse stands at the base of the cliff not far from the ore shed.*

DC 15: *The footfalls of a lone individual can be heard walking back from the nearby stream.*

DC 22: *A single, small figure, clothed in black, sits high atop the framework tower above the mine house. It is almost invisible against the night-dark sky.*

Tactics

The three human rabble at the main camp are likely to be surprised by the attack of the PCs. They are cowardly but know a hangman's noose awaits them if brought back to civilization in custody and fight with a desperate ferocity, using *mob rule* as much

as possible. If not also surprised, the human rabble coming back from the stream with a bucket of water immediately charges in to join his comrades.

The human bandit is indisposed in the outhouse and doesn't join the battle until the third round. He attempts to use Stealth to sneak into the trees and throw daggers from concealment to gain combat advantage. He charges in to use *dazing strike* against a badly wounded foe or a spellcaster that hangs back and isn't as well defended.

The goblin sharpshooter sits atop the head frame sipping whisky from a tin cup. Upon spotting the PCs or when the attack begins, he drops it among the girders and braces of the head frames where it clatters all the way down the mine shaft alerting the Graybairn brothers within. A DC 20 Perception check is necessary to hear this telltale alarm from outside the mine building. He then makes *sniper* attacks, using Stealth to stay hidden on the head frame and maintain combat advantage after successful hits. The sharpshooter does not call down to his allies below, selfishly choosing to maintain his own element of surprise rather than give the humans a chance to react.

Development

As long as the human bandit and goblin sharpshooter live, the human rabble continue to fight. If both are killed, the rabble attempt to scatter into the benighted woods to find happier hunting grounds.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light within 10 squares around the campfire. Dim light elsewhere (quarter moon waxing).

Trees: Squares containing trees are difficult terrain and provide concealment to anyone standing in them. A tree's trunk provides cover (–2 to attack rolls) to anyone standing adjacent to it.

Stream and Pond: The stream is 2 feet deep, and each square is difficult terrain. It is ice cold. The pond is shallow (5 feet deep) within 5 feet of the bank and deep (10 feet deep) beyond that. Creatures in the water gain cover (–2 to attack rolls) except against submerged enemies. Fighting in the water imposes a –2 penalty to attack rolls except with spears and crossbows.

Shallow water squares are difficult terrain. Creatures in deep water require an Athletics skill check to move, and powers that have the fire keyword take a –2 penalty to attack rolls. A creature that moves from an area of shallow water into a deep water square ends its movement in that square unless already swimming.

Escarpment and Waterfalls: The sides of the canyon are steep and rocky. The first escarpment is 15 feet high. The second, atop which the hoist house and waterwheel sit, is 10 feet high (a 25-foot drop to the west of the mine). The last escarpment is 20 feet high. They can be scaled with a DC 15 Athletics check. Attempting to scale them through the waterfalls requires a DC 25 Athletics check, but the falling water provides concealment to those doing so.

Bedroll: The brigands sleep on filthy bedrolls. They have no effect on movement.

Mine Buildings: These are constructed of time-silvered, vertical wooden planks—some missing altogether. Climbing these walls requires a DC 25 Athletics check. The roof is made of wooden shingles and sloped at a nearly 45-degree angle, requiring a DC 10 Acrobatics or Athletics check to move across at normal speed. Doors are wooden and have a Break DC of 16, AC 5, Fortitude 10, Reflex 5, and 20 hp. They can be barred from within.

Waterwheel and Gears: This assembly has been frozen in place with rust and corrosion. Climbing the waterwheel requires a DC 10 Athletics check. The gear enters the hoist house through a hole, cut to size, in the plank wall.

Head Frame: The lower course of this framework—10 feet high—is composed of horizontal planks and requires a DC 15 Athletics check to climb. Above that, the remaining 20 feet of its height is composed of heavy crossbeams bolted together and requires only a DC 5 Athletics check to climb. Anyone positioned among these timbers has cover (–2 to attack rolls). Chains dangle from the pulleys at the peak of the head frame and can be scrambled down with a DC 10 Athletics check.

G2. Upper Works

Encounter Level 1 (425 XP)

Lambert Graybairn, halfling slinger (L)
Finneus Graybairn, halfling thief (F)
2 stirges (S)

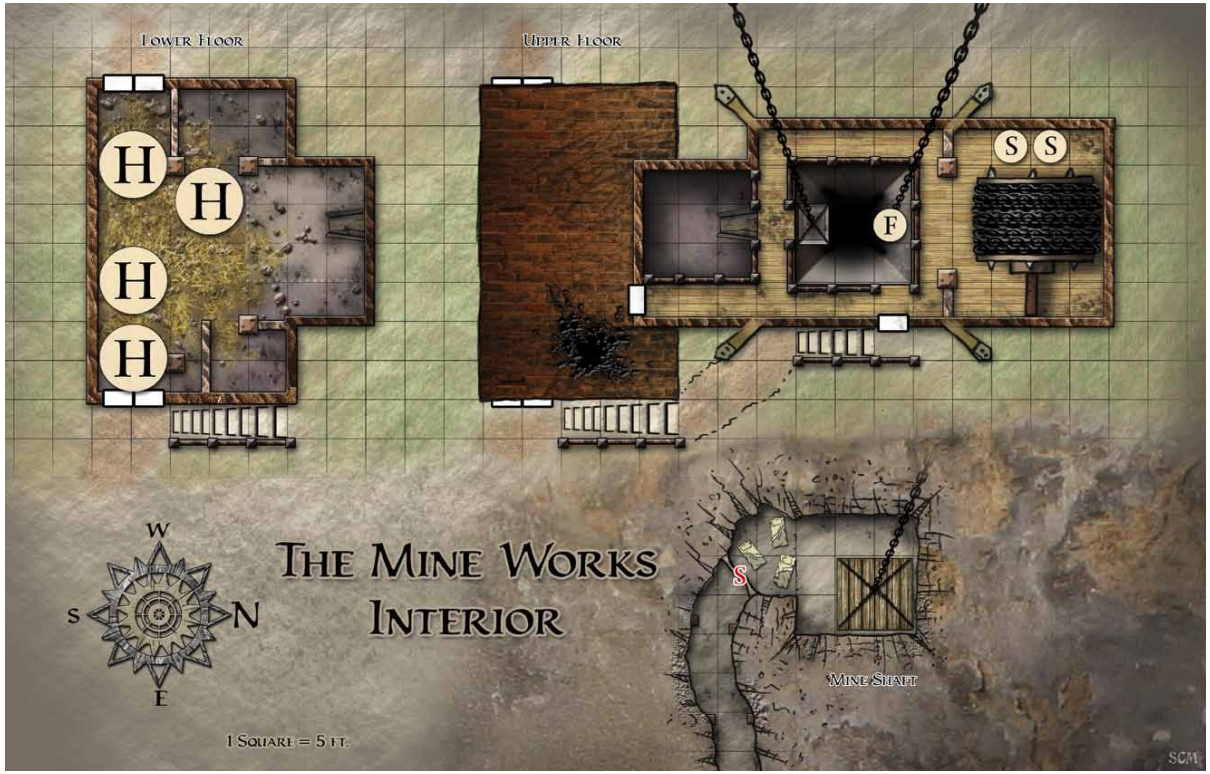
Setup

This encounter takes place inside the mine buildings.

These structures are set up on two different levels of the canyon wall. The lower level is the old ore shed, where ore brought up from the mine was loaded into carts and hauled away for separation and processing. It is now being used as a stable for the gang's mounts (the horses are indicated on the map by H tags). The ceiling of the lower level is 15 feet at the south end and rises to 25 feet at the north end.

The second level consists of the housing for the mine shaft as well as the hoist house. The mine shaft lies directly below the head frame. The hoist in the hoist house once controlled the lift and the ore skip that descended into the mine by pulleys from the head frame. The gears and drums are all frozen now with rust and time and no longer function. The ceilings of these two chambers are 20 feet high, though that above the mine shaft opens up into the buttressing of the head frame above so that it is open to the sky.

None of the occupants of the building are in plain sight. Only reveal them as the party succeeds on Perception checks or are attacked.



If the PCs enter by way of the lower doors into the ore shed, read:

This rickety structure is occupied by four horses that shuffle nervously at your entry. Portions of the room have been sectioned off into stalls, and the northernmost portion is open to the mine buildings above, a railed balcony looking down and the scored wood of an old chute descending from it. A portion of the shed's ceiling has collapsed above one of the stalls leaving a gaping hole. A sharp odor permeates the chamber.

Perception Check
DC 19: *A small form huddles in the shadows of one of the stalls, the glint of steel in its hand.*

The Brothers Gray keep a pair of stirges as pets. They are only half trained and as a result the brothers have hit upon a foul-smelling salve that repels stirges and have spread it upon the horses. A DC 10 Nature check identifies the smell as some sort of herbal repellant, but it takes a DC 15 check to recognize it as useful against stirges in particular.

If the PCs enter by way of the upper doors into the hoist house, read:

Water drips from a framework of heavy beams above that look up into the night sky. Heavy chains descend from ancient pulleys into the yawning mouth of a mine shaft encased in a wooden railing. One chain suspends a cast-iron ore skip, but the other descends into the darkness of the shaft. To the south, a balcony overlooks an ore chute into the shed below. To the north is the heavy, chain-wrapped drum of the mine's old hoist.

Perception Check

DC 15: *The flutter of tiny wings can heard from behind the hoist drum.*

DC 19: *Dangling from the chains above is a small, dark form. It swings something in its hand.*

Tactics

Alerted by the goblin sharpshooter or the sounds of battle, Lambert hides in one of the stalls in the ore shed, while Finneus climbs the lift chain to a point 20 feet above the mine shaft opening and hides in the shadows among the head frame.

If the party enters the ore shed, Lambert uses *mobile melee attack* to sneak among the horses and gain combat advantage. While the horses are not combatants, they allow Lambert to duck through their squares. The horses do not view the heroes as allies, and will not allow them to simply move through their spaces. Lambert then makes his escape through the hole in the roof to regroup with Finneus above.

Finneus makes sniper attacks. From his perch, he can sling his stones down over the balcony at targets in the ore shed.

The stirges doze from perches on the side of the hoist drum but awake once individuals enter the building. In the second round after the adventurers enter, they swoop to attack.

Lambert Graybairn, Halfling Thief (L) — **Level 2 Skirmisher**
Small natural humanoid — XP 125

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +1
HP 34; **Bloodied** 17
AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14; see also *nimble reaction*
Saving Throws +5 against fear effects
Speed 6; see also *mobile melee attack*

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs. AC; 1d4 + 3 damage.

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 5/10; +7 vs. AC; 1d4 + 3 damage.

Mobile Melee Attack (standard; at-will)
The halfling thief can move up to 3 squares and make one melee basic attack at any point during that movement. The halfling thief doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when moving away from the target of its attack.

Combat Advantage
The halfling thief deals an extra 1d6 damage on melee attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.

Nimble Reaction
Halflings gain a +2 racial bonus to AC against opportunity attacks.

Second Chance (immediate interrupt, when the halfling would be hit by an attack; encounter)
The halfling thief forces the attacker to reroll the attack and take the new result.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Goblin
Skills Acrobatics +11, Stealth +9, Thievery +11
Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 16 (+4) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 10 (+1) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 14 (+3)
Equipment leather armor, 4 daggers, thieves' tools

Finneus Graybairn, Halfling Slinger (F) — **Level 1 Artillery**
Small natural humanoid — XP 100

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +5
HP 22; **Bloodied** 11
AC 15; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13; see also *nimble reaction*
Saving Throws +5 against fear effects
Speed 6

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+4 vs. AC; 1d4 + 4 damage.

Sling (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 10/20; +6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage.

Stone Rain (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
The halfling slinger makes three sling attacks, each with a -2 penalty on the attack roll.

Combat Advantage
The halfling slinger deals an extra 1d6 damage on ranged attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.

Nimble Reaction
Halflings gain a +2 racial bonus to AC against opportunity attacks.

Second Chance (immediate interrupt, when the halfling would be hit by an attack; encounter)
The halfling slinger forces the attacker to reroll the attack and take the new result.

Sniper
A hidden halfling slinger that misses with a ranged attack remains hidden.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Goblin
Skills Acrobatics +6, Stealth +9, Thievery +11
Str 12 (+1) **Dex** 18 (+4) **Wis** 11 (+0)
Con 10 (+0) **Int** 10 (+0) **Cha** 14 (+2)
Equipment leather armor, dagger, sling with 20 bullets

2 Stirges (S)		Level 1 Lurker
Small natural beast		XP 100
Initiative +7	**Senses** Perception +0; darkvision	
HP 22; **Bloodied** 11		
AC 15; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 10; see also *bite*		
Speed 2; fly 6 (hover)		
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)		
+6 vs. AC; 1d4 damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape) and takes ongoing 5 damage until it escapes. An attached stirge doesn't make attack rolls while grabbing a target and gains a +5 bonus to its AC and Reflex defenses.		
Alignment Unaligned		**Languages** –
Skills Stealth +8		
Str 8 (-1)	**Dex** 16 (+3)	**Wis** 10 (+0)
Con 10 (+0)	**Int** 1 (-5)	**Cha** 4 (-3)

Development

Once the bandits and stirges have been dealt with, the adventurers can search the mine buildings at their leisure. If they search the ledge in the mine shaft or possibly through questioning of prisoners, A DC 15 Perception check reveals that one of the Brothers Gray is missing. Encounter 3 occurs whenever you deem appropriate, though allowing the PCs at least a short rest to recover is appropriate. Their level of preparation will depend on how carefully they investigate this area of the mine.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light in the ore shed and beneath the head frame where some moonlight can seep in. Dark elsewhere.

Mine Shaft: This shaft drops 300 feet before ending in a gallery below that opens into numerous mine drifts that are beyond the scope of this adventure. The shaft's walls are rough-hewn and damp and require a DC 25 Athletics check to climb. The ledge occupied by the Brothers Gray is 30 feet below the lip of the shaft. The lift is suspended at this level. A rope tied between the ledge and the lift allows it to be swung over to allow access to the ledge.

Ore Skip and Lift: These conveyors are frozen in place unless the hoist is somehow made operational again. Their chains can be climbed with a DC 5 Athletics check. The ore skip provides cover and concealment to anyone crouching inside.

Railings and Chute: The railings around the balcony and mine shaft are made of wood and are 3 feet high. They are still sturdy but do not provide cover. The ore chute can be climbed with a DC 20 Athletics check.

Support Posts and Horse Stalls: The support posts in the ore shed run from floor to ceiling and provide cover (-2 to attack rolls) to anyone standing adjacent to it. The northeastern post has subtle handholds cut into it, allowing it to be climbed with a DC 5 Athletics check to reach the hole in the ceiling. The stalls have wooden walls 4 feet high that provide cover and concealment to anyone behind them.

Hoist Winch: This massive iron drum is wrapped in chains and was once operated by gears entering through the side wall from the waterwheel outside. It is not rusted and corroded into mobility. The floor beside it is covered in bloody droppings beneath where the stirges nest. The hoist drum provides cover to anyone behind it.

Bedrolls: The three halfling brothers have bedrolls that are much cleaner and in better shape than those of the other bandits. They have no effect on movement.

Secret Door and Tunnel: This secret door requires a DC 20 Perception check to locate. Beyond it is a played-out drift tunnel shored up with timbers. It is explored further in a future adventure. The brothers are unaware of its existence.

G3. HOMECOMING

Encounter Level 1 (550 XP)

Moseley Graybairn, halfling prowler
1 human berserker
1 gray wolf

Setup

Run this encounter after the PCs have explored the mine buildings and dealt with the bandits and had a chance to take a short rest and recover somewhat, but before they depart. If they are aware of a third halfling brother, they are likely to be alert to his possible return. If they wait for him to show up, allow the heroes a Perception check to detect his return as described below. Otherwise, the remainder of the gang returns from scouting while it is still dark and learns that something is amiss as soon as they are within sight of the fire and find that their companions are dead or gone.

No map is provided for this encounter as it can occur anywhere you see fit. The exterior of the mind building is a likely spot for the PCs to set up their ambush, if they choose to do so, in which case you could use the map from G1.

Perception Check
DC 15: *The faint clop of a horse's hoof sounds on the forest floor, followed by a whicker and jingle of harness as a horse and rider quietly make their way toward the mine.*

When the remaining bandits attack, read:
A burly human with an ugly scar across his face charges into battle with a greataxe. Behind him, a halfling in leather armor stands beside a snarling wolf and raises a small crossbow.

Tactics

If the bandits are aware of the PCs' presence, then they remain in the shadows of the woods while trying to scout around and discern where the intruders are. Otherwise they ride into camp and dismount before realizing anything is wrong. Each rides a horse, but both dismount before fighting and the horses remain as noncombatants.

The human berserker charges the most likely looking foe with his greataxe. Moseley hangs back and fires poisoned crossbow bolts, trying to remain in the concealment of shadows as much as possible. If forced into melee, his wolf always remains adjacent to him to allow him to use his crowd shield unless they are able to catch someone in a flank and gain combat advantage.

Moseley Graybairn, Halfling Prowler	**Level 6 Lurker**
Small natural humanoid	XP 250
Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +8	
HP 52; **Bloodied** 26	
AC 18; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 157, **Will** 15; see also *crowd shield* and *nimble reaction*	
Saving Throws +5 against fear effects	
Speed 6	
Short Sword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**	
+10 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage, and the halfling prowler makes a secondary attack. *Secondary Attack:* +8 vs. Fortitude; the target takes ongoing 3 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both).	
Hand Crossbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**	
Ranged 10/20; +10 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage, and the halfling prowler makes a secondary attack. *Secondary Attack:* +8 vs. Fortitude; the target takes ongoing 3 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both).	
Catfall	
If the halfling prowler falls, reduce the distance it falls by 20 feet when determining how much damage it takes.	
Crowd Shield	
The halfling prowler gains a +2 bonus to its AC and Reflex defense if it has one creature adjacent to it, or a +4 bonus if two or more creatures are adjacent to it.	
Nimble Reaction	
Halflings gain a +2 racial bonus to AC against opportunity attacks.	
Second Chance (immediate interrupt, when the halfling would be hit by an attack; encounter)	
The halfling prowler forces the attacker to reroll the attack and take the new result.	
Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Goblin	
Skills Acrobatics +14, Athletics +9, Stealth +12, Streetwise +10, Thievery +14	
Str 12 (+4) **Dex** 18 (+7) **Wis** 10 (+3)	
Con 10 (+3) **Int** 10 (+3) **Cha** 15 (+5)	
Equipment leather armor, poisoned short sword, hand crossbow with 10 poisoned bolts, thieves' tools	

Human Berserker	**Level 4 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid	XP 175
Initiative +3	**Senses** Perception +2
HP 66; **Bloodied** 33; see also *battle fury*	
AC 15; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 14	
Speed 7	
⊕ **Greataxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+7 vs. AC; 1d12 + 4 damage (crit 1d12 + 16).	
Battle Fury (free, when first bloodied; encounter)	
The human berserker makes a melee basic attack with a +4 bonus to the attack roll and deals an extra 1d6 damage on a hit.	
Handaxe (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Ranged 5/10; +5 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common
Skills Athletics +9, Endurance +9	
Str 17 (+5)	**Dex** 12 (+43) **Wis** 11 (+2)
Con 16 (+5)	**Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 12 (+3)
Equipment hide armor, greataxe, 2 handaxes	

Gray Wolf	**Level 2 Skirmisher**
Medium natural beast	XP 125
Initiative +5	**Senses** Perception +7; low-light vision
HP 38; **Bloodied** 19	
AC 16; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13	
Speed 8	
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)	
+7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 2 damage, or 2d6 + 2 damage against a prone target.	
Combat Advantage	
If the gray wolf has combat advantage against the target, the target is also knocked prone on a hit.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 13 (+2)	**Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 13 (+2)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 2 (-3) **Cha** 10 (+1)

Development

This is potentially a difficult fight. Moseley is the toughest of the three brothers. If the PCs aren't up to a battle of this difficulty, you might allow them an extended rest before Moseley and his crew returns to the mine.

Moseley and the human berserker fight to the death, knowing that a hangman's noose awaits them if captured. If Moseley is killed, the gray wolf flees into the woods.

If the Brothers Gray gang is destroyed and proof is presented to whomever hired the heroes, the PCs will be rewarded with 150 gp for destroying this serious threat to the area.

Features of the Area

Depending on where the fight takes place, use the Features of G1 or G2.

About the Author

Greg is a lifelong gamer who has been writing adventures for the past half-dozen years. He received his first ENnie award last year, leaving only the Heisman Trophy and Nobel Prize on his list of lifetime goals. He considers himself to be well ahead of schedule.

HEROIC
1–10

Death in the Pincers

A Chaos Scar Adventure

By Rob Heinsoo

illustrations by Patrick McEvoy ✦ cartography by Sean Macdonald

"Death in the Pincers" is a short adventure for five 1st-level characters that takes place in the Chaos Scar, near the King's Wall. It starts as a fight with drakes modified by a Chaos Shard, turns into a battle in the middle of shifting magical terrain against giant ants that are trying to steal the drakes' treasure-laden bodies, and ends with a second battle against giant ants fixated on eating the characters instead of the drakes.

If you're not playing a Chaos Scar campaign, you can still use this adventure by integrating it into any existing campaign situated near a wilderness area that had mining operations at some point in the past. Unlike some Chaos Scar adventures, it features a great deal of interaction with an active chunk of the meteor. If you use the adventure somewhere other than the Chaos Scar, you'll want to invent your own explanation for the meteorite's magic.

For details on the Chaos Scar and its environs, read the Chaos Scar introduction and check out the map of the entire valley.

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Background

Near the King's Wall, a cavern with an exposed chunk of the Chaos Meteor jutting from its wall has been taken over by a rage drake and a pack of drake followers. The rage drake has been altered by proximity to the Chaos Shard, while the rest of its pack has yet to feel the meteor's effects. The rage drake has been weakened by the shard as its evolution takes place, but also granted a higher intelligence. Its innate cunning now supplemented by a growing intelligence, the drake is on the verge of regaining its potent melee form and drawing even more drakes to its pack.

Each of the lesser drakes has patches of glowing and bumpy purple skin caused by exposure to the meteorite. The lesser drakes' mutations have not yet altered their abilities, though each has features that surface when bloodied or after it has been slain (see "Tracking Bloodied Spaces and Drake Corpses," below).

The rage drake has been substantially altered, with boosted intelligence and a bite that enrages its targets so that they revert to the most rudimentary attacks.

When not leading a hunting foray into the world beyond the cavern, the rage drake spends its time coiled around the meteorite, muttering and cooing to it. The other drakes bask as close to the meteorite as they can get or prowl restlessly in circles if they have come too close to the meteorite and been cuffed away by the rage drake.

Meanwhile, in the rock walls surrounding the cavern, a newly established colony of giant ants has been drawn to the drakes' meteorite. The ant colony and a small group of stirges that feed off the ants' leavings, have made two attempts to rush the drakes, coming in through the main tunnel first, and then through a hole the ants dug out in the ceiling 40 feet above the cavern floor. The drakes have defeated both attacks, aided by magical bolts from the meteorite triggered by its link to the rage drake.

Now low on hive soldiers and warriors, the giant ants wait for their next chance. They have prepared two other holes in the ceiling of the chamber that are ready to collapse. Now they have pulled back, waiting for the drakes to go raiding or for any other favorable circumstances. The party's elimination of the drakes will provide just such an opportunity; the ants gather their forces from throughout their colony and assault the chamber a few minutes after the characters have confronted the drakes.

Adventure Synopsis

The characters track the drakes to their lair and enter. They must contend with the drakes and their meteorite fragment, which contributes to the battle through its link with the rage drake reaver.

Once the characters have dispatched the drakes, the ants, lurking in the ceiling above, begin their assault, trying to claim the Chaos Shard for themselves. The characters must repel two waves of giant ant attacks or flee. If they prevail, however, they can profit quite a bit. And then they must decide how to deal with the Chaos Shard now in their possession.

Getting the Players Involved

"Death in the Pincers" takes place in the Chaos Scar. The adventure hooks that follow provide information and motivation that could put the characters on the trail of the drakes. If you want to use both hooks together, cut each quest's XP in half.

The adventure might work best if the characters have already encountered another piece of the meteorite or are otherwise clear that pieces of the meteorite are dangerous objects that should probably be destroyed. A Chaos Shard has already been encountered in "Den of the Slave-Takers," and more Chaos Scar adventures featuring the shards are on the way.

Hook 1: Hunt the Residuum Drakes

A human hunter named Jarek who ventured too close to the Chaos Scar while hunting in the woods had his prey, and nearly his life, taken by a pack of drakes that were covered with glowing blue scales. Jarek escaped while the drakes killed his horse. Jarek had lost a friend a few weeks before to drakes colored like these, so when the drakes that attacked him wandered back into the Chaos Scar, Jared followed and picked off one with his bow before it could disappear into a tunnel with the rest of its pack.

The drake Jarek slew was already injured. A few minutes after he killed it, the drake's corpse developed weird blisters on its skin. One broke open and blew into fine silvery powder. Jarek isn't sure, but he's heard that folk proficient with magic use a similar substance. When the hunter shows the characters the corpse of the drake, it still has three un-popped blisters. If the characters pop a blister, they find their hands or weapon covered with a small puff of residuum, the raw stuff of magic. Each blister seems to yield about 50 gp worth of the stuff!

Quest XP: 150 XP for discovering whether the rest of the glowing drakes also manifest residuum blisters when slain, or 200 XP if the characters give Jarek some form of reward for letting them in on this windfall.

Hook 2: Revenge & Rewards

One of the party's friends or acquaintances has been slain near the Chaos Scar by a pack of glowing drakes. The friend slew one of the drakes before dying. Use the effects described in the first hook to describe the oddities of the drake's skin. When revenge and greed coincide, can characters resist for long?

Quest XP: 100 XP for avenging their friend. 100 XP for getting every last jot of residuum.

Treasure Preparation

"Death in the Pincers" distributes treasure slightly differently from other D&D® adventures. Characters find coins worth a varying amount of gold in the rock spikes surrounding the low daises in the drake's cavern. They also find a level 3 magic item in the rock spikes, though not all groups will find it. Draw the item from the characters' wish lists.

Depending on their success at driving off the giant ants, the characters can also gain raw residuum from the drake's corpses, though they might not be able to gather that treasure until encounters D2 and D3 are over.

Getting Started

Regardless of the hook used to get the characters into the Chaos Scar, read or paraphrase the following when they reach the vicinity of the drake's tunnel.

This is the place. The tunnel slopes down steeply at first but is high and broad. It's dark, but even those of you who read only books, not tracks, can see the footprints of man-sized reptiles in the debris and mud outside the tunnel mouth.

Between Encounters

Each of the encounters in this adventure takes place in the same cavern, though the second and third encounters have features the first encounter does not. As DM, the question of pacing will hinge on the characters' motives for remaining in the cavern instead of turning around: greed and a desire to deal with the meteorite chunks.

Greed

The characters' main motivation for staying in the cavern to rest could be greed. First, they were told that it takes a few minutes for the residuum blisters to appear on the skins of the drakes. Mechanics for gathering the residuum from the blisters can be found in encounter D2, since the blisters take about 5 minutes to manifest, approximating the moment the second encounter begins.

Second, the spiky rocks around both daises (see "Features of the Area" in encounter D1) are littered with a surprising amount of coins, a gem or two, and possibly even a magic item (see "Treasure Preparation," above). Unlike most treasure reward situations, use the treasure in the spiky rocks to reward high Perception checks, so that the characters feel like they are actually managing to find treasure other heroes might have missed.

It takes a minute to search each square thoroughly. Lump the areas into 5-square sections and assume that it takes about 5 minutes for a character to gather the treasure in a section. Each section holds an average of 20 gp, and one holds the level 3 magic item above. The first character to make a DC 20 Perception check searching a 5-square area finds it.

Dealing with the Chaos Shard

The flickering meteorite chunk in the south wall can be destroyed with a single blow of a weapon, and it crumbles into dust if any attempt is made to remove it from the wall. The magic it once possessed, except for its purple glow, was long ago exhausted.

The glowing chunk in the north wall is another matter. It seems to be physically and magically invulnerable. Weapons, spells, and prayers neither damage the chunk nor affect the wall to which it is attached. After observing a failed attack against the meteorite, an adventurer who succeeds on a DC 15 Arcana or Religion check perceives a flaw in the meteorite's supernatural defense. An impromptu ritual requiring roughly an hour and 25 gp of residuum will be sufficient to drive a wedge in the aura of invulnerability surrounding these meteorite chunks. Unlike most other rituals, the ritual is sped up considerably for each other character who helps by chanting alongside the ritual caster; each ally who helps reduces the time necessary for the ritual by 10 minutes (to a minimum time of 30 minutes total).

Encounters D2 and D3 will interrupt such efforts, at least at first.

A few groups might debate the point and decide that Chaos Shards capable of creating residuum-laden monsters should be preserved rather than destroyed. As DM, you could be grateful, since they will be providing you license to create bizarre and catastrophic consequences of their attempt to harvest future residuum-blistered monsters.

D1. Glowing Drakes

Level 2 Encounter (700 XP)

Setup

1 guard drake (G)
1 needlefang drake swarm (N)
1 rage drake reaver (R)
2 spitting drakes (S)

The broad tunnels leading to the drakes' cavern are lit by the last rays of the penetrating sun during the day, which counts as dim light. At night, the tunnels are entirely dark. Characters who make a DC 12 Dungeoneering check notice scrape marks along the walls that appear to have been left by giant scales; characters whose check result equals or exceeds 16 notice that the scrape marks are ancient, far older than the claw prints on the floor.

About 60 feet from the 15-foot cliff that marks the edge of the drake's cavern, compare the characters' passive Perception to DC 15. A character who succeeds hears a rasping, scratching noise deep within the walls. The sounds do not repeat. The sounds are ants from the new queen's colony, preparing to break through the walls to initiate encounter D3, but at this point in the adventure, the scratching in the walls is a paranoia-enhancer, not a threat.

If the characters travel with light sources of their own, the gently glowing needlefang drake swarm atop the cliff will be alerted when the party's light reaches the cliff. If the characters travel in the dark, compare their Stealth check to the drake swarm's passive Perception of 12 as soon as they are within 30 feet of the cliff. When the drake swarm senses the characters, the drakes squeal and growl and cascade back toward the cavern to warn the rest of the pack.

The rest of the drakes roll initiative the turn after the swarm begins screaming. Except for the guard drake, the drakes are buried in purple dreams from the meteorite, and they are slowed in the first round of combat. If the characters stealthily evade or eliminate the guard drake, the drakes other than the guard drake have a –4 penalty on Perception checks to detect the characters as they enter the main cavern.

Tracking Bloodied Spaces and Drake Corpses

This encounter requires you to keep track of two unusual elements.

First, whenever a drake becomes bloodied, mark the square it is in and all adjacent squares as blood rock—creatures in these squares score critical hits with a natural attack roll of 19 or 20. When a creature attacks from such a square, describe the attack as magically vicious, aided by the magic of the spilled blood. The effect lasts until the end of the adventure, significant since later encounters are likely to be fought in the same area.

Second, keep track of the square in which each drake is reduced to 0 hp. It's probably better to keep track of the squares in which the drakes' bodies lie rather than marking the squares on the board, since the zones created by these meteorite-altered drakes' death auras won't come into play until encounter D2.

When the characters approach the 15-foot cliff, read:
At first it looks like the tunnel ends ahead of you, but then you see that it's a 15-foot wall of boulders. It looks like it would be easy to climb, but smaller boulders and piles of bones are jumbled in the heap, complicating your steps. There's a faint purple glow moving about somewhere above the top of the cliff.

If the characters enter the main cavern before the drakes can reach them in the tunnel, read:
The cavern is lit by a brightly glowing purple chunk of rock in the north wall and a smaller flickering chunk on the south wall, both set on raised daises surrounded by spiky, glowing rock. Hissing with fury, drakes spit and claw their way toward you from the north. The drakes have crusty purple growths on their skin, but these growths glow purple like the rock, as do the drakes' eyes.

When the rage drake reaver first hits a character with its claws or a bite, read:
As its attack draws blood, the rage drake meets your gaze with its glowing reptilian eyes. It lets out a rumbling growl, licks its lips, and speaks! "More!" it bellows, and comes toward you again.

The first time a character bloodies a drake, read:
As your attack hits home, the drake's blood explodes from its eyes and the growths on its skin, staining the rock nearby a glowing purple.

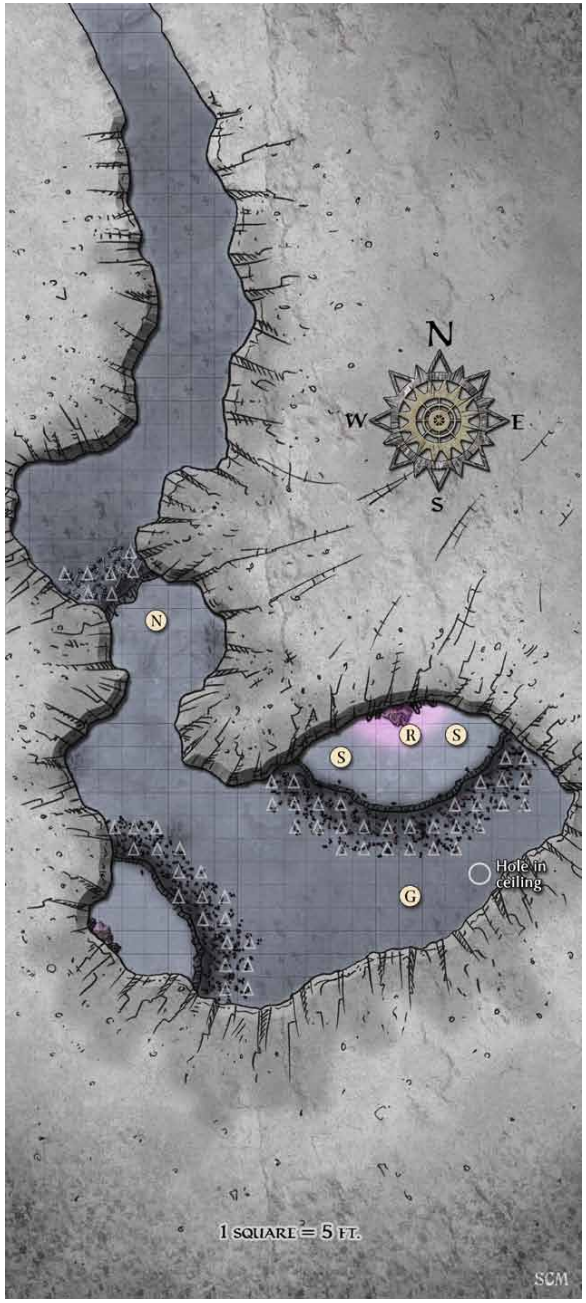
The first time a character slays a drake, read:
The drake goes down in a fountain of blood and an explosion of magical energy. It's hard to be certain in the rush of the fight, but there's no sign yet of the residuum you're hoping for.

Guard Drake (G) **Level 2 Brute**
Small natural beast (reptile) XP 125
Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +7
HP 48; **Bloodied** 24
AC 14; **Fortitude** 15; **Reflex** 13; **Will** 12
Immune fear (while within 2 squares of an ally)
Speed 6
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage, or 1d10 + 9 damage while within 2 squares of an ally.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 16 (+4) **Dex** 15 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 18 (+5) **Int** 3 (-3) **Cha** 12 (+2)

Rage Drake Reaver (R) **Level 3 Brute**
Large natural beast (reptile) XP 150
Initiative +2 **Senses** Perception +2
HP 56; **Bloodied** 28
AC 15; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 13
Immune fear (while bloodied only)
Speed 6
⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage.
Raking Charge (standard; at-will)
When the rage drake reaver charges, it makes two claw attacks against a single target.
Enraging Bite (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage, and the rage drake reaver makes a secondary attack. *Secondary Attack:* +5 vs. Will; until the end of its next turn, when it attacks, the target can only make a melee basic attack.
Reaving Rage (while bloodied)
While bloodied, the rage drake reaver gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls (and triggers the meteorite's attack, if it is nearby).
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Str 18 (+5) **Dex** 12 (+2) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 16 (+4) **Int** 7 (-1) **Cha** 11 (+1)

Needlefang Drake Swarm (N) **Level 2 Soldier**
Medium natural beast (reptile) XP 125
Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +7
Swarm Attack aura 1; the needlefang drake swarm makes a basic attack as a free action against each enemy that begins its turn in the aura.
HP 38; **Bloodied** 19
AC 18: **Fortitude** 15; **Reflex** 17; **Will** 14
Immune fear; **Resist** half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 5 against close and area attacks
Speed 6
⊕ **Swarm of Teeth** (standard; at-will)
+8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 2 damage, or 2d6 + 2 against a prone target.
Pull Down (minor 1/round; at-will)
+3 vs. Fortitude; the target is knocked prone.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 15 (+3) **Dex** 18 (+5) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 2 (-3) **Cha** 10 (+1)

2 Spitting Drakes (S) **Level 3 Artillery**
Medium natural beast (reptile) XP 150 each
Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +3
HP 38; **Bloodied** 19
AC 15: **Fortitude** 14; **Reflex** 16; **Will** 14
Resist 10 acid
Speed 7
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 2 damage.
Caustic Spit (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**
Ranged 10; +8 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 4 acid damage.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 18 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 3 (-3) **Cha** 12 (+2)



Tactics

The spitting drakes attempt to stay on the low dais, spitting at characters in the rock spikes or beyond the rocks. The guard drake and needlefang drake swarm fight to keep the characters stuck in the cavern where the spitting drakes can hit them. The rage drake holds the line in front of the spitting drakes unless it takes damage from a ranged or area attack, in which case it attempts to charge into combat against a lightly armored target. Unlike most rage drakes, the reaver fights cannily, avoiding flanks, dodging away from too many attackers, and trying to use its bond with the glowing meteorite chunk to its advantage (see "Features of the Area").

The other drakes fight like blood-crazed beasts, but all are familiar with the Blood Rock effect that occurs around them when they become bloodied. All the drakes, particularly the rage drake, try to launch melee attacks from such blood rock squares, though they're not canny enough to try and keep the characters off the squares.

The guard drake is assigned to guard the rage drake reaver.

Features of the Area

Unless stated otherwise, each of the features below also applies to encounters D2 and D3.

Illumination: Steady purple light from the large meteorite chunk and flickering purple light from the defunct rock on the south wall amount to normal illumination.

Defunct Meteorite: The chunk of meteorite on the south wall is about the size of a halfling's head. It flickers with purple light but has otherwise expended its magic.

Cliff: The 15-foot-tall wall of boulders is an extremely easy climb (DC 5 Athletics).

Glowing Meteorite Chunk: A jagged, glowing, purple Chaos Shard protrudes from the north wall of the cavern. The meteorite is tuned to the rage drake's blood. While the rage drake is bloodied, each of the rage drake's attacks that hits also causes the Chaos Shard to target two different random enemies within 20 squares with flashing blue rays (+6 vs. Reflex; the target falls prone; see Rock Spikes, below).

Hole in Ceiling: This is the hole the giant ants came through on their first attempt against the drakes. It's 40 feet above the ground and is unlikely to have any impact on this battle.

Low Daises: The two meteorite chunks are at the center of natural plateaus raised 5 feet above the cavern floor. Moving from the cavern floor to the top of the plateau requires 2 squares of movement. It is not possible to shift from the cavern floor to the top of the plateau. The edge of the plateau makes an excellent defensive position since enemies wishing to move to the top must move instead of shifting.

Rock Spikes: These unnatural protrusions from the cavern floor seem to be reactions to the meteorites' magic. These squares count as difficult terrain. In addition, any creature knocked prone or that drops prone in a rock spikes square, or that crawls into a rock spikes square, takes 5 damage.

Each time a character enters a rock spikes square during combat, he or she can make a DC 10 Perception check. Success indicates that the character notices gold and silver coins scattered throughout the rock spikes along with bones. A thorough search after the fight turns up a good deal of treasure from the drakes' earlier victims.

D2. Ants from Above

Level 1 or 2 Encounter (550 or 800 XP)

Setup

2 armorcutter ants (A)
10 hive worker ants (H)
2 stirges (S)

As 1d6 residuum blisters finally manifest on each of the dead drakes, two new holes open in the ceiling. (If you don't want to roll randomly, distribute 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 blisters on the drakes as you like.) A stirge flies through each, followed by giant ants, clambering across the ceiling and down the walls to swarm the bodies of the dead drakes.

This encounter is meant to frighten the characters at the moment they were hoping to collect the residuum they are due. The encounter looks more threatening than it really is, because the ten hive workers aren't concerned with attacking the characters. In this encounter, they're focused only on trying to drag the bodies of the drakes up into the ant holes and back to the colony. The fight is complicated by the fact that each of the dead drakes has an aura surrounding its body (a side effect of the magic of the meteorite), and by the fact that attacks around the drakes' corpses might *destroy* some of the residuum.

Given the complexity of the encounter and the threats to their treasure, give your characters full XP for the hive workers they defeat even though the workers aren't principally concerned with fighting.

When the residuum blisters manifest on the dead drakes, read:

As you've been waiting for the blisters to form, you've sensed that the bodies of the drakes have begun to manifest some sort of magic, as a gradually rising glow of different colors surrounds each of the bodies. Blisters surface on the skin of the drakes, just as you'd hoped. But before you can begin to truly harvest the residuum, you hear scratching overhead. Stone falls from two holes in the ceiling and two bat-winged insects fly down out of the dust and debris, followed by waves of giant ants!

2 Armorcutter Ants (A) — **Level 4 Brute**
Medium natural beast — XP 175 each

Initiative +2 — **Senses** Perception +6; low-light vision, tremorsense 10
HP 68; **Bloodied** 34
AC 16; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12
Speed 6, climb 6

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+7 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 damage.

⸸ **Shred Armor** (standard; requires combat advantage against the target; at-will)
+7 vs. AC; 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target takes a -4 penalty to AC (save ends).

✧ **Thrash** (immediate reaction, when first bloodied; encounter)
Close burst 1; targets enemies; +5 vs. Reflex; 1d10 damage, and the target is knocked prone. *Miss*: Half damage.

Hive Armorcutter Frenzy (when any giant ant within 10 squares of the armorcutter is reduced to 0 hit points)
The armorcutter makes a *bite* attack.

Alignment Unaligned — **Languages** –
Str 16 (+5) — **Dex** 11 (+2) — **Wis** 11 (+2)
Con 18 (+6) — **Int** 2 (-2) — **Cha** 4 (-1)

10 Hive Worker Ants (H) — **Level 1 Minion**
Medium natural beast — XP 25 each

Initiative +0 — **Senses** Perception -1; low-light vision, tremorsense 10
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion
AC 15; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 10
Speed 6, climb 6, burrow 2 (tunneling)

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC; 4 damage.

Hive Worker Frenzy (free, when any giant ant within 10 squares of the hive worker drops to 0 hit points; at-will)
The hive worker shifts 2 squares.

Alignment Unaligned — **Languages** –
Str 17 (+3) — **Dex** 15 (+2) — **Wis** 9 (-1)
Con 14 (+2) — **Int** 2 (-4) — **Cha** 4 (-3)

Tactics

Rather than passing through the rock spike areas, the giant ants climb along the walls to get at enemies or drake bodies on the low daises.

The stirges wait until the armorcutters are near the cavern floor before attacking, then focus on enemies near the larger creatures. Quick characters might be able to pick off a stirge before it attacks.

In order to use their *shred armor* ability, the armorcutters attack characters grabbed by the stirges or use the hive workers to gain a flanking position.

The hive workers don't attempt to cooperate with the armorcutters. The hive workers focus entirely on removing the bodies of the slain drakes.

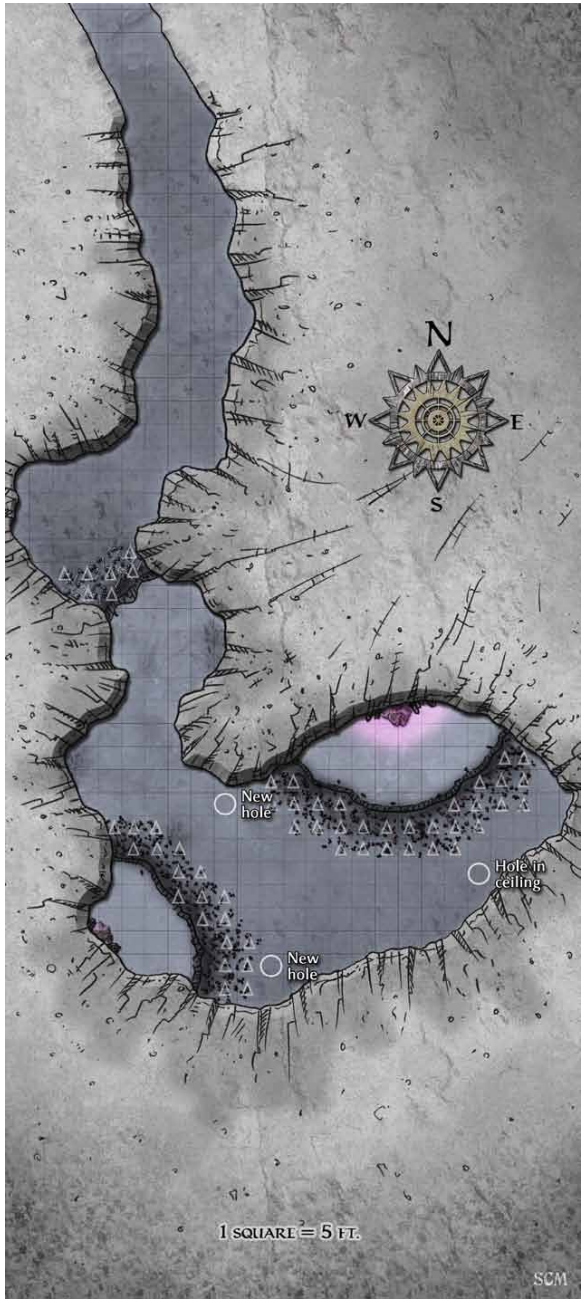
It takes a move action for each hive worker to pick up a drake's corpse or join a carry. An ant carrying a corpse alone is slowed. Two ants moving together can carry a drake's body in one of their spaces and have speed 4 while moving the body. Three ants cooperating to move one drake's body can move at speed 6. The *hive worker frenzy* ability enables workers to make even better speed with a drake's corpse when a member of their colony is slain. A worker that exits through a hole in the ceiling won't return.

2 Stirges (S) — **Level 1 Lurker**
Small natural beast — XP 100 each

Initiative +7 — **Senses** Perception +0; darkvision
HP 22; **Bloodied** 11
AC 15; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 10
Speed 6, fly 6 (hover)

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC; 1d4 + 3 damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape) and takes ongoing 5 damage until it escapes. An attached stirge doesn't make attack rolls while grabbing a target and gains a +5 bonus to its AC and Reflex defenses.

Alignment Unaligned — **Languages** –
Skills Stealth +8
Str 8 (-1) — **Dex** 16 (+3) — **Wis** 10 (+0)
Con 10 (+0) — **Int** 1 (-5) — **Cha** 4 (-3)



In order to attack, a hive worker has to let go of the corpse it is carrying. The worker ants use opportunity attacks if they have not already picked up a drake, but otherwise the workers attack only in two cases: If they are immobilized or otherwise prevented from approaching, grabbing, or moving with the corpse of one of the slain drakes, or if an individual hive worker survives an attack against it after the two armorcutters have been eliminated.

Features of the Area

Many of the features of the cavern are the same as the features from the first encounter. The glowing meteorite chunk no longer attunes attacks with the bloodied rage drake reaver and the characters are likely to have spotted the treasure in the rock spikes, but otherwise the features of the cavern are pretty much the same. Additional features are as follows.

Cavern Ceiling: The ceiling is 40 feet above the floor. Ants climbing out of the holes in the ceiling generally aren't able to move to the floor and attack in the same turn.

Drake Death Zones: The corpses of the drakes killed in encounter D1 create magical zones in a burst 1 (creating a 3-square by 3-square space that the zone occupies, or 4 by 4 for the Large rage drake reaver), which manifest fully 5 minutes after the end of that encounter (which is why it's important to keep track of where each drake fell in battle in the first encounter). Each of the drake types creates a different zone; all zones cover the square in which the drake was slain and each adjacent square, though a couple of the zones leave the bodies and move elsewhere. As usual, zones can overlap.

Blast Cloud Zone (Spitting Drakes): The blood of the spitting drakes spirals into the air, creating a purple and red haze. Squares in the cloud are lightly obscured. When a burst or blast created by a fire, force, lightning, psychic, or thunder power touches a square of blast cloud, the size of the burst or blast is increased by 1.

Death Shadow Zone (Needlefang Drake Swarm): Shadows of swirling drakes seem to wash over the area. All attacks in this zone deal an extra 1d6 psychic damage. Whenever a creature within 5 squares of the zone is reduced to 0 hp, the zone moves to center on that creature's square.

Death Crescendo Zone (Guard Drake): Devotion in life turns to venom in death. Each time a creature is reduced to 0 hp in this zone, all attacks in the cave during the next turn gain a +2 attack bonus. When a creature within 5 squares of the zone uses a healing surge, the zone moves to center on that creature's square.

Rage of the Wild Zone (Rage Drake Reaver): The rage drake reaver's blood infuses this area with a zone that forces each non-beast creature that starts its turn in the zone to make a melee attack on that turn or take 5 psychic damage.

Residuum Blisters: Each of the drakes slain in the first encounter has manifested 1d6 residuum blisters. When broken by an adjacent character and gathered into a vial (a standard action), each blister provides 50 gp of residuum.

A character who wants to use a minor action to scrape a residuum blister must make a DC 15 Thievery or Arcana check. Success indicates that the character gathered the residuum successfully. Otherwise half the residuum from that blister was lost.

For dramatic effect, feel free to scrape away a blister or three as the ants drag a drake toward their holes.

D3: March of the Hive

Level 1 Encounter (500 XP)

Setup

1 hive warrior ant (H)
1 hive soldier ant (S)
9 hive worker ants (W)

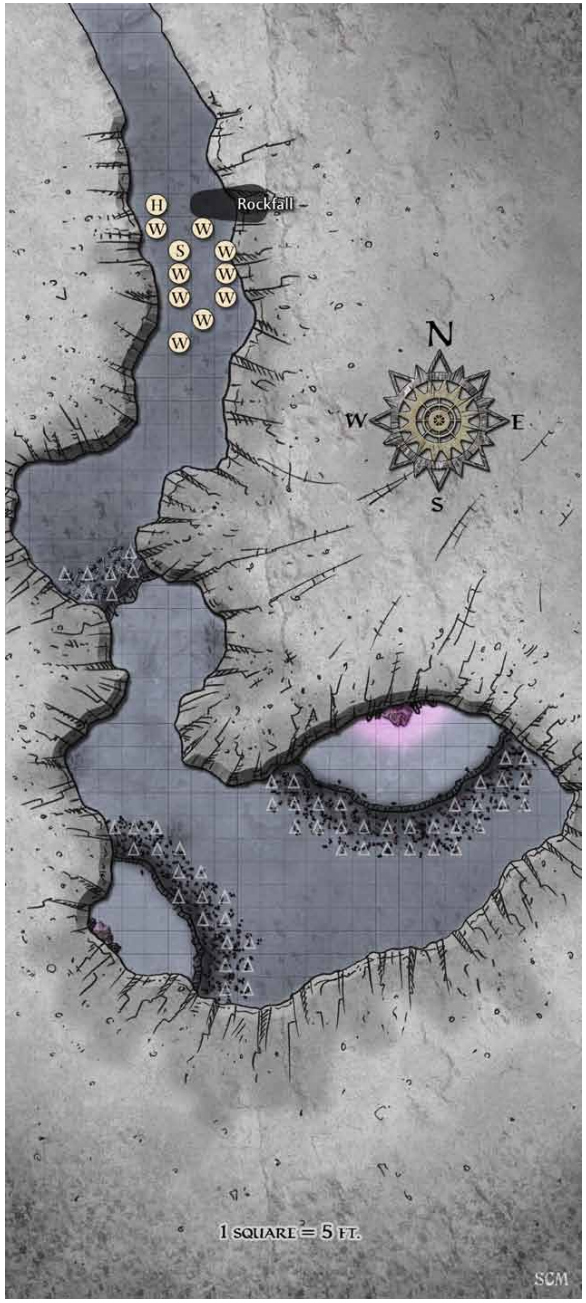
While the characters catch their breath from the attack of the armorcutters, the ants digging through the walls of the tunnel to the surface announce their arrival with a thunderous crash. The ants march up the 15-foot cliff and into the cavern to claim the meteorites for the colony.

There's nothing fancy about this fight. At the DM's option, the death auras of the drakes might linger after the residuum blisters have been scraped away, or you can end the auras, whichever suits you.

The hive has already been depleted by earlier attacks against the drakes, so if this attack fails, the worst the characters will see afterward are hive worker antennas twitching occasionally on the far side of the holes.

When the characters have had a couple minutes to wipe off the ichor and catch their breath, read:
There's a huge crash from the north tunnel, the way you came in, and dust puffs into the room as if a big mass of stone had been displaced farther up the tunnel.

Hive Soldier Ant (S)	**Level 3 Soldier**
Medium natural beast	XP 150
Initiative +6	**Senses** Perception +0; low-light vision, tremorsense 10
HP 46; **Bloodied** 23	
AC 18; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 12	
Speed 6, climb 6	
ⓘ **Grasping Mandibles** (standard; usable only while the hive soldier does not have a creature grabbed; at-will)	
+10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target is grabbed.	
⸸ **Acid Sting** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**	
Targets a creature grabbed by the hive soldier; +10 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 acid damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).	
✧ **Death Convulsion** (when the hive soldier drops to 0 hit points)	
Close burst 1; targets enemies; +8 vs. Reflex; the target is knocked prone.	
Hive Soldier Frenzy (free, when any giant ant within 10 squares of the hive worker drops to 0 hit points; at-will)	
The soldier gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls until the end of its next turn.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 17 (+4)	**Dex** 15 (+3)	**Wis** 9 (+0)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 2 (-3)	**Cha** 4 (-2)



Hive Warrior (H)	Level 2 Skirmisher
Medium natural beast	XP 125
Initiative +6	**Senses** Perception +4; low-light vision, tremorsense 10
HP 36; **Bloodied** 18	
AC 16; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 11	
Speed 8, climb 8	
⊕ **Piercing Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**	
+7 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage. The hive warrior's attack deals 1d10 extra acid damage to any target that already has ongoing acid damage.	
Hive Warrior Frenzy (free, when any giant ant within 10 squares of the hive worker drops to 0 hit points; at-will)	
The warrior is no longer marked or cursed, and it shifts 2 squares.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 9 (+0)
Con 12 (+2)	**Int** 2 (-3) **Cha** 4 (-2)

10 Hive Workers (W)	Level 1 Minion
Medium natural beast	XP 25 each
Initiative +0	**Senses** Perception -1; low-light vision, tremorsense 10
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion	
AC 15; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 10	
Speed 6, climb 6, burrow 2 (tunneling)	
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)	
+6 vs. AC; 4 damage.	
Hive Worker Frenzy (free, when any giant ant within 10 squares of the hive worker drops to 0 hit points; at-will)	
The hive worker shifts 2 squares.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 17 (+3)	**Dex** 15 (+2) **Wis** 9 (-1)
Con 14 (+2)	**Int** 2 (-4) **Cha** 4 (-3)

Tactics

When the soldier stings a character and delivers ongoing acid damage, the hive warrior attempts to follow up with its *caustic reaction* attack.

These hive workers are angered by the smell of all the previous ant deaths in the cavern. They ignore the drakes' bodies and attack the characters.

If the characters are dealing with the encounter easily, add more hive workers, from the tunnel or ceiling, one or two at a time.

Features of the Area

The features are the same as those in encounter D2, with the following exception.

Rockfall: The area indicated as the rockfall is now a narrow passageway that requires Medium creatures to drop prone to crawl through, but it is not impassable.

About the Author

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PARAGON
11-20

Clash of Steel

By Jennifer Clarke Wilkes

An adventure for characters of 13th level

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The small city of Barrinsgate has only recently become a fairly respectable trading center. It began as a ragtag bandit encampment, but over the years slowly evolved into a safe haven for shady dealings and illegal trade. Its most powerful bandit leaders grew wealthy and expanded the scope of their trade to more legitimate goods and services. In time-honored tradition, they gave themselves noble titles. The former fireside council of warlords has become the Circle of Peers, presided over by a Lord Mayor who is little more than a mouthpiece for the council. Nevertheless, bandit gangs are still a large part of the city's landscape.

Unknowingly, the bandits had established their lair close to the territory of an elder steel dragon, Irvythisk. At first, their small predations went unnoticed by the dragon, who was more concerned with consolidating control over the rest of her territory. As the bandits became more influential and more wealthy, though, her attention turned toward expanding her influence over the burgeoning settlement. Irvythisk infiltrated the bandits in human form, taking the name Stella Daybringer. She quickly rose to power as a powerful warlord and helped direct Barrinsgate's development into a true city. All the while, she diverted wealth to her ever-growing hoard.

Now the Lady Stella wields great power within the Circle of Peers, both through her own reputation and behind-the-scenes influence on key rivals. The Circle, through the Lord Mayor, generally speaks with her voice. As a respected antiquities merchant, Stella is well placed to have first pick of rare or unique items that pass through the city's markets for her "collection." Through an alternative humanoid form, known as Dark Star, who can be contacted only through a criminal network, she fences difficult-to-move items. She provides wealthy collectors with hard-to-find pieces at a very nice profit, or simply spirits items away to her hoard. Her Dark Star persona also makes occasional deals with several of the city's gangs to help her lay hands on valuable goods or put pressure on rivals.

Irvythisk's sister, Vythcaex, has long coveted her sister's wealth and territory, and the two dragons have been involved in power struggles for over a century. Vythcaex, also an elder steel dragon (known as "Blade" to her contacts) is working to undermine Lady Stella's reputation in Barrinsgate. She has inserted a mercury dragon operative into the city's most powerful gang, the Bloody Knives, replacing its leader, Sven the Fist. Lady Stella has worked well with this gang in the past but has not formed an intimate relationship with its leader, so the replacement is not known to her. Under Blade's control, the gang is bringing in "heavy hitters" to overpower watch patrols and throw the city into disorder. This also provides good cover for thefts and other mayhem to help enrich the gang and its secret patron—and destabilize Lady Stella's operations.

In addition to her agent in the gang, Blade has seduced a key rival to Stella on the council. This gentleman has long espoused a law-and-order crackdown in the city, and she has been suggesting to him that only the free market can handle the job properly. As the city becomes more lawless and chaotic, his voice carries more influence on the council.

Stella sees her grip on the city steadily slipping away, and she suspects that the increased gang violence is being directed by someone behind the scenes—quite possibly her sister. Gang activity is moving well beyond her occasional deals, and she has been unable to find out what's going on. She cannot reveal her true nature, and she is afraid that her gang connections might become public knowledge—which would destroy her politically and commercially. She needs outside agents with no stake in Barrinsgate to investigate and deal with the threat. That's where the adventurers come in.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The heroes receive a letter from Lady Stella. In it, she explains that Barrinsgate is being threatened and that she needs seasoned and competent agents to help her deal with it. She offers to pay generously and invites the party to meet with her in her council offices to work out the details.

However, Blade has secretly introduced her cat familiar into Lady Stella's household. It informs her that Stella has sent for outside help. She orders Sven to eliminate the PCs before they get to the meeting.

After they deal with the ambush, the adventurers meet with their would-be employer and negotiate the terms of their hire. At this time Stella does not inform them of her criminal connections. But as the negotiations proceed, a city watch patrol is ambushed by Sven's heavy hitters, killing all of its members. The news comes to the councilor's chambers during the meeting. From this point the PCs can take several paths as they investigate.

They might talk to a deceased watch soldier. They can learn from the spirit that the patrol was ambushed by a group wearing the distinctive colors of another gang. However, this was a misdirection intended to divert the PCs away from the Bloody Knives.

If the PCs try following the cat familiar, they are lured to an abandoned warehouse in the waterfront district. Once inside, gangsters block the exits and set alight the oil-soaked timbers of the structure.

Should the PCs try to track gangsters or find out more about the Bloody Knives gang, they are directed to the vicinity of a construction project. They are attacked by a rogue industrial automaton that has been tampered with by Blade.

If the PCs get too close, or they survive one or more of the above traps, Sven decides to take them out preemptively. He sends a tougher squad of heavies to kill them.

After several life-threatening encounters, and under pressure to restore order, the PCs talk with Stella again to see if she knows more than she has been saying. At that point she has no choice but to come clean about her dealings with the gangs. She reveals her connections with the Bloody Knives gang and is surprised to learn that its leader is no longer loyal to her.

With Stella's assistance, the heroes face Sven in person. She contrives a challenge by another rival gang, leaving Sven defended by only a few trusted bodyguards. When he sees the jig is up, he reverts to his dragon form for a final showdown.

Starting the Adventure

As the adventure begins, the characters are between adventures. They are met by a courier bearing the insignia of a noble, who after confirming their identities, brings a message from Barrinsgate addressed to them. Show or hand to the players the letter provided here.

The letter includes a calling card impressed with a noble seal (a cat rampant) to present as proof of her invitation.

To the brave and honorable company of adventurers from the Lady Stella Daybringer, count of Barrinsgate, greetings.

As a councilor of Barrinsgate's Circle of Peers, I have the responsibility for security in this frontier city. In recent weeks, the city watch has come under increasingly violent attacks, and crime on the whole has increased. These assaults seem calculated to weaken both the rule of law in Barrinsgate and my own authority on the council.

Word of your bold exploits has come to my ears. I am in need of proven investigators to act as my agents in this matter. I invite you to meet with me in private to discuss this assignment and negotiate terms of employment. I assure you that you will be paid most handsomely for your efforts.

This matter is of the utmost urgency. My messenger has been instructed to await a response. In the name of peace, I trust that you will accept this invitation.

Other Ways to Get the PCs Involved

A letter out of the blue can be a hard sell for your players. Here are some ideas for connecting Lady Stella's request to the PCs' activities in your campaign.

Hook: Something Wicked That Way Goes

If the offer of money and the opportunity to do good aren't enough to motivate your players, maybe the chance to smash monsters is. A rampaging terror is troubling the countryside near Barrinsgate, and only doughty adventurers can defeat it. This creature can be anything well suited to the party's level, such as a hill giant with its pet gorgons, a roc preying on local herds, or a ravenous behir. It might even be a raiding party of drow or a roving squad of elemental archons. Whatever the threat, the PCs are hired by the Circle of Peers to deal with it.

Quest XP: 500 (minor quest) for defeating the monster and bringing proof to the Circle. Lady Stella then sends a private communication, inviting them to meet with her on an unrelated but equally dangerous threat to the community. This hook bypasses the gang ambush but can lead to a direct attack by Sven (page 83).

Hook: Innocent Bystander

An acquaintance or relative of the PCs in Barrinsgate has fallen victim to the rising lawlessness. He or she might be a shop owner who can't make newly raised protection payments, or an ordinary citizen or someone passing through who was caught in the crossfire and seriously wounded or even killed. Whatever the circumstance, the PCs get word of the trouble and are asked to help.

Quest XP: 3,500 (major quest) for investigating the incident and determining the Bloody Knives' involvement. This hook bypasses the gang ambush but can lead to a direct attack by Sven. Lady Stella learns of the PCs' activities and invites them to work with her.

Part 1. Shantytown Ambush

As the PCs approach Barrinsgate, they are ambushed in the crowded, filthy shantytown outside the city.

Tactical Encounter: R1. Shantytown Ambush (page 72).

If they manage to take any captives, the PCs don't learn much. The assassins do not wear identifying colors or other insignia, although their leader has a distinctive scar. The heavy hitters have been infused with draconic essence to create servants loyal to Blade. Any such captive refuses to provide useful information and does not reveal his or her affiliation with the Bloody Knives without magical compulsion. However, the infusion manifests in unexpected abilities not normally possessed by that race. Astute characters might notice this and wonder about it—it is a subtle clue that the thugs are more than they appear.

A minion has no such compunction, however, and can be forced to admit membership in the gang. (The captive might even assert this proudly, threatening the party with revenge by his or her gang mates.) The minion knows nothing more than that the group was sent to kill the PCs.

Interlude: A Puzzling Theft

After the ambush fails, Blade looks for other ways to stop or at least interfere with the heroes. The meeting with Stella can't be prevented, but further snooping into the gang's business could be bad for the party's health.

Blade concocts a fiendish plan. The first step requires obtaining a personal but unimportant item, such as shoes, a kerchief or headband, or something similar.

If the characters are staying at an inn that is in or near the Bloody Knives' turf, the gang forces the innkeeper to procure such an item. A bar server distracts the character by flirting outrageously and plying him or her with drink, then slips the item off or creates an opportunity for an associate to do so. Alternatively, gang members might start a bar fight to provide a chance to snatch the item in the melee.

If the characters are staying in another area, getting an item requires another tactic, such as using street urchins to snatch something, or a simple lift using Thievery.

In the next phase of the plan, Blade incorporates the stolen item into an industrial automaton as a key to attack the party (see "Hard Hat Area," page 68).

A character might never notice the item is missing. If its absence is discovered, though, the PC might be puzzled by the situation. Resourceful characters might use a Detect Object ritual to try tracking it down. Locate Object can find it precisely, but this is beyond the ability of the party unless the PCs can find a high-level ritual caster. If the PCs can get a handle on the item's general location, they are not surprised when the trap is sprung.

Part 2. Meeting Lady Stella

Whether or not the PCs immediately begin to investigate the gangs, at some point they have to meet with their prospective employer. (The messenger has already returned with their acceptance.)

Lady Stella maintains offices in the Circle district, adjacent to the council's meeting hall. From here she conducts most of her legitimate city business but is suspicious of information leaks from her public office.

Read or paraphrase the following as the PCs approach.

At the center of the great plaza stands a sumptuous edifice of massive timbers adorned with stonework: the Hall of the Circle, seat of the city's government. Uniformed guards flank the heavy front doors, and squads of the city watch ostentatiously patrol the plaza and the wide street that rings the hall. Surrounding the hall, across the circular street, are several smaller buildings that house the machinery of government: the court, records offices, and the like. To the rear of the hall rises another impressive structure, almost as richly built as the government building itself, and with its own complement of guards. These are the offices of the Circle members.

When the PCs ask to see Lady Stella, the guards will not allow the heroes access unless they present her seal. Once the guards have verified their identities, they escort the PCs to the councilor's office.

You are ushered into a richly appointed antechamber, hung with the insignia of the city watch as well as the noble device of the Lady Stella Daybringer. An officious secretary asks your names again and instructs you to wait, disappearing behind a highly polished and gilded wooden door. After a few minutes, the secretary reappears and gestures for you to enter. The door closes behind you with a solid thunk.

This room is immense, with high ceilings and leaded windows framed by heavy brocade curtains—which are currently drawn. Several chandeliers illuminate the space, which contains a small number of expensive-looking art objects: exquisite vases, old-looking paintings, delicate ivory sculptures, and the like. Behind an antique desk sits a slightly built female eladrin of indeterminate age, dressed simply but elegantly. A jeweled patch, its gems outlining the form of a cat, covers her right eye as she gazes appraisingly at you.

Skill Challenge: R2. The Negotiation (page 74).

Getting Paid

If the PCs successfully negotiate this skill challenge, they earn a promise of substantial payment from Lady Stella, equivalent to one treasure parcel (level 13), on completing the mission. In addition, they earn 3,500 XP (major quest) for revealing the conspiracy to her.

If the PCs fail and must undertake a task to restart the negotiations, the payment offer is reduced by 25%. Should they manage to fail more than once but eventually conclude the deal, they still receive the reduced payment, but the quest XP is reduced by half (1,750 XP).

Finally, the PCs also find a level 13 treasure parcel in the Bloody Knives hideout at the end of encounter R7 Rumble.

Barrinsgate's Gangs

Whether the PCs learn about the Bloody Knives' involvement in the attack on them or simply want to investigate before they decide what to do next, they might want to ask around in town about that gang. In the course of their investigations, they can learn some basic information about the history and structure of the gang struggles in Barrinsgate.

History: Basic inquiries at the city's hall of records or by talking to old-timers can glean the following bits of information.

DC 10: The city of Barrinsgate was, until fairly recently, a large bandit encampment. Leaders of various bandit groups met at the site from time to time to discuss territorial boundaries and mutual responses to outside threats (that is, the law).

DC 15: Fifty years ago, a new bandit lord arose. The eladrin Stella Daybringer was a charismatic leader who quickly established a strong voice in the fireside councils. She recommended that the brigands, having tamed the surrounding territory, found a proper settlement. She argued, correctly, that the authorities would not harass the gangs so much if they were engaged in maintaining some sort of order in the district—even if not all the activities were strictly licit.

DC 17: The campgrounds of the various bandit gangs developed into the "neighborhoods" of the new settlement. The most powerful groups claimed the best turf, while the weakest were pushed toward the less desirable areas. The leaders awarded themselves noble titles and established an exclusive living area. The fireside council site became the new Circle of Peers.

DC 20: The city's bandit history has colored the community to this day. In the less well-policed parts of town, several gangs have de facto control over business and day-to-day affairs. There are two major gangs, one smaller one, and a handful of street-corner toughs. Hand out the map of gang turf on page 58.

DC 22: After her elevation to the peerage, Stella Daybringer, who now holds the title of count, dissolved her ties to her former bandit gang. Most of its former members became more-or-less respectable citizens, but it's said a few holdouts became what's now the Bloody Knives.

Streetwise: Making inquiries in gang-controlled neighborhoods or speaking with local experts reveals the following.

DC 10: Gangs are the de facto government of the poorer areas. In the market and waterfront districts, no one gang has control and turf struggles are common. Heavily patrolled areas, such as the Circle and the Peerage, and the more exclusive shopping district, have no gang presence. The shantytown outside the river gate is a no-man's-land in which any sort of criminal roams freely. Proxy turf wars are common there.

DC 15: There are three major gangs (give players the city map handout), as well as a handful of small groups that exist mainly in the shantytown and in small corners of the poorest areas.

The Bloody Knives are the largest and most powerful gang. They control much of the waterfront and Fireside, a poor working-class district. The River Rats are the second-largest group and claim the rest of the waterfront—they are in constant turf struggles with the Bloody Knives there. They also have some influence in the dirt-poor Stumpton district. The third gang, the Black Hearts, is much smaller than the River Rats and largely confined to the worst sections of Stumpton.

DC 20: Lately the Bloody Knives have been more aggressive in their turf wars, and they have been cracking down more brutally in the areas they control. There have been some brazen attacks on watch patrols recently, and rumors swirl that the Knives are behind them. The gang's leader, Sven the Fist, has been uncharacteristically aggressive these last few months.

DC 22: Stella Daybringer, who now holds the title of count, established an antiquities and rarities business as an example of legitimate commerce. She deals in consignment by appointment only. Rumors persist that she is still in contact with the gangs, but no one has ever discovered any evidence to that effect.

DC 25: Stella's rival in the Circle, Lord Erinblad de Vast, has been the most vocal public figure condemning the gangs. He has recently begun consorting with a veteran of the bandit wars, and since that time has begun to claim that Lady Stella knows more about them than she has let on.

Disaster Strikes

While the negotiations proceed, the situation in Barrinsgate suddenly becomes much more serious. Another watch patrol is ambushed after dark, in a less well-traveled area of the market district, and all its members are killed. The news comes to the Lady Stella's chambers as she is meeting with the PCs.

If the PCs succeed on the skill challenge during the third stage, the message does not arrive until after all parties have agreed on their next action. Lady Stella considers the matter urgent but is willing to let the PCs make their own decisions about how to proceed.

If they fail the skill challenge, news of the attack comes in the midst of bargaining. Lady Stella abruptly ceases negotiations and demands that the PCs immediately investigate the crime. See "From the Horse's Mouth" below.

Part 3. Investigation

From this point the PCs can take several paths in any order during the course of an extended skill challenge as they begin their investigation.

Skill Challenge: R3. The Investigation (page 76).

From the Horse's Mouth

If the PCs talk to a dead watch soldier, the spirit does not recall very much. The assault was swift, well coordinated, and brutal.

The soldier does remember that the ambushers wore yellow-and-green headbands. If the PCs have made any inquiries into the gangs of Barrinsgate, they recognize the distinctive colors of the River Rats gang. One detail that impressed the soldier, though, is that the attackers used swords rather than the simple clubs and knives normally expected of gang fighters.

The spirit also mentions that one of the attackers had a scarred face, including a mangled ear. This is the gang lieutenant who led the first ambush against the party (see "Development" in encounter R1). If the PCs have killed or captured her, the soldier instead recalls a distinguishing feature of a dragon-infused gangster, who is part of the group that attacks a second patrol (see encounter R6).

The attack took place in an area of the market district that borders on the riverfront. If the PCs make any inquiries into the gangs of Barrinsgate, they recognize that territory as being hotly contested by the River Rats and the Bloody Knives.

What's Really Going On: Sven, taking matters into his own hands, ordered a squad of his newly recruited heavies to take out the patrollers while disguised as members of a rival gang. He hopes to give the Bloody Knives an advantage in its bid to control more of the market district, as well as to raise the general level of chaos.

However they handle the situation, the PCs ultimately learn that the River Rats didn't have anything to do with the attack. Indeed the Rats' leader, if he or she survives, is angry to learn of the setup and is interested in getting revenge on whoever is responsible. Clever PCs might exploit this situation and call on the leader as an ally in the final confrontation (see "Rumble," page 84).

Rat Catchers

If the PCs decide to confront the River Rats directly, they are powerful enough to effectively destroy the gang. You can create a level 10 tactical encounter in an urban setting (the street scene from encounter R6 will do in a pinch) using the thugs from encounter R1 as ordinary gangsters and human knife fighters (*Monster Manual 2*, page 146) as tougher warriors. A human pirate captain (*Monster Manual 2*, page 148) makes a suitable gang leader.

If the PCs instead choose to try talking to the gang's leader, they have to make contact and convince the gang members that the meeting is legitimate. This can be handled as a fairly basic skill challenge (level 12, complexity 1 [4 successes before 3 failures], DC 16 Diplomacy, Perception, and Streetwise checks, DC 21 Intimidate checks) or simply through roleplaying.

Abandoned Warehouse

If the PCs successfully warned Lady Stella about her cats, Blade learns of it from her familiar during that night's contact. Gathering information in that way is now too great a risk. But she has one more task for the familiar, which might rid her of the troublesome investigators.

If the PCs decide to observe the cat, it makes sure they follow it to an old warehouse on the riverfront, which has been rigged as a death trap. It enters through a partly open door, waits a few moments, then slips out again through a small ventilation opening.

Blade rigs a simple deception to convince the PCs to enter the warehouse. She has created the illusion of a cloaked and hooded humanoid figure standing in a corner opposite the door, holding the cat. The illusion activates when the familiar moves past it, then appears to pace about and whisper in arcane gibberish.

Skill Challenge: R4. Burning Warehouse (page 78).

The PCs should escape, but unless they put out the fire, the warehouse explodes. The good news is that the explosion blows out that fire; the bad news is that it scatters flaming debris over nearby buildings and triggers additional blazes. The resulting pandemonium makes further tracking impossible in the neighborhood. All the city watch patrols (except one in the Circle and one in the Peerage) are called to help deal with the conflagration, which means the crime rate increases in the unguarded parts of town. Stella's rival on the council insists on hiring mercenary forces immediately and finds little resistance to the idea (see "Law and Order" on page 69).

Hard Hat Area

Although Sven's people have been pressuring the inhabitants of areas controlled by his gang to keep quiet, he knows that someone will talk. So he also had the gangsters drop false hints about an upcoming deal at a construction site.

Blade has created a key from the item stolen earlier from a party member (see "Interlude: A Puzzling Theft" above) and arranged for it to be implanted into the industrial automaton at the site.

Tactical Encounter: R5. Construction Site (page 80).

Once the automaton is triggered, it pursues that character relentlessly, even if the party flees the site, and causes untold destruction in its wake. If the party doesn't destroy it, the town's patrols must try. Focusing on this threat means the crime rate increases in unguarded parts of town. In addition, some of the watch soldiers are likely to be killed in the fight, leaving the city dangerously weak even if the rampaging construct is defeated. This situation gives Stella's rival on the council the political leverage to force the hiring of mercenary forces (see "Law and Order" on page 69).

Watch Out!

If the party decides (or is ordered) to shadow a watch patrol, Sven eventually makes a move against it, forcing the PCs to intervene.

Tactical Encounter: R6. Patrol Ambush (page 82).

In his overconfidence, Sven attacks the patrol in broad daylight. This time the ambushers don't bother wearing River Rats colors, but they don't wear those of the Knives either. One of the PCs might recognize one or more of the heavies from an earlier attack or from the dead patroller's recollection.

Law and Order

The latest attack on the watch patrol (see page 82) shocks the city. No one is safe, it seems, and the aristocratic class demands that something be done to restore stability to the streets of Barrinsgate.

The half-elf Lord Erinblad de Vast is an influential member of the Circle who oversees public works, including the maintenance of government offices. A key rival of Lady Stella, he has long coveted her portfolio of city security. Erinblad is a loud proponent of law and order and suspects that Stella retains some connection to the gangs, but he has no proof. Recently, though, he gained some support for his suspicions in conversations with Amydis, a retired soldier who settled in Barrinsgate a little over a year ago. The two soon began an intimate relationship, and his lover has been urging him to keep a close eye on Lady Stella. As a result, Erinblad has been stepping up his attacks on her in the Circle.

Amydis is another identity for Blade, who is covering her bets by exerting influence directly on the council as well as through her agent in the gang. In her humanoid guise, she poses as a veteran of campaigns against bandits who still has useful contacts among military organizations. She is urging Erinblad to have the city hire a private security force as an alternative to the watch, but he has never been able to secure enough votes in the Circle to do so. With the outbreak of violence, Lord Erinblad sees a chance to make his move. He calls an emergency session of the Circle.

Lady Stella has no choice but to attend. She cannot bring the PCs to this closed meeting, nor does she want to call attention to the fact that she has hired mercenaries of her own. A raucous session ensues, and the general panic leads the rest of the Circle to support Lord Erinblad's motion to bring in a private security force over Lady Stella's objections.

Amydis just happens to have a group of mercenaries ready to go. They are in fact toughs from the Bloody Knives gang, hired through Sven. Groups are assigned to patrol the Circle, Peerage, and market districts. Rough and brutal, they push aside ordinary citizens and threaten anyone they consider unsavory. They severely beat, and in one case kill, troublemakers (conveniently, members of a rival gang). The first citizens of the city—with Lady Stella a notable exception—praise the new, no-nonsense approach to security.

Now the pressure is really on Lady Stella to identify and put an end to the gang troublemaking. She has lost a lot of prestige on the council, but if she can expose and eliminate a dangerous influence, she can regain her stature. Even better would be to discredit Erinblad's mercenaries—and by extension, her political rival. She pushes the PCs to resolve this matter quickly.

Making the Connection

Sven has once again been reckless: One of the hired mercenaries was part of the group who ambushed the party or the watch patrol. Whether the PCs get into a fight with the toughs or simply spend time observing them, they eventually recognize the gangster.

Confronting Lord Erinblad is difficult. He refuses to meet with the PCs and has private soldiers guarding his office and home. Even if the PCs do somehow speak to him, he refuses to believe the PCs' assertions. He accuses them of sowing chaos with their wild accusations and threatens to have them arrested or

worse. The mercenaries, he says, were hired through a reliable source with unimpeachable credentials.

If the PCs report what they've learned to Lady Stella, she is forced to accept the fact that the Bloody Knives have turned against her. Telling the PCs requires revealing her own connections to the gang. But she can't let things continue as they are, and she can't deal with the Bloody Knives overtly. She has to come clean.

Optional Encounter: Public Enemies

If you really want to ratchet up the pressure or simply give your players more opportunities to fight, you can arrange to put the PCs right in the middle of the gangs and the mercenaries.

Blade sees another opportunity to get the adventurers out of the picture. She suggests to Lord Erinblad that they are a threat to the city's stability, being little more than a band of hired thugs themselves. He sees his chance to further weaken Stella on the council and dispatches a patrol of mercenary guards to arrest the party or run them out of town. Alternatively, the party runs afoul of a mercenary patrol (perhaps when they try to speak with Lady Stella again.)

This is a level 13 encounter (XP 4,000). You can use the city streets map from tactical encounter R6 (Patrol Ambush). Replace the watch patrollers on the map with dragon-infused gangsters and the watch sergeant with a Bloody Knives lieutenant; there are no ambushing gangsters.

Even if the PCs prevail, they are going to be seen by the public as dangerous hoodlums—especially if they kill any of the mercenaries.

Why didn't you tell us earlier about your connection with the Bloody Knives?

"I didn't think it was important. I do 'business' with the organization from time to time, but I have never ordered violent activity."

Who is in charge of the gang?

"A man named Sven. He has been the gang's leader for years, and I trusted him completely. I don't understand why he has turned on me like this."

Could he be under some sort of malign influence?

"Possibly. Or someone paid him a lot of money. He's still a bandit at heart."

How can we get to Sven?

"The gang's headquarters is a fortified manor in the Campfire district, but the place is well defended, especially if he has brought in such tough warriors. It would be better to isolate him."

Stella's idea is to draw out at least some of the gang through a challenge to Sven's authority. The best way to manage this is a gang confrontation. While some of the gang is off dealing with the challenge, Sven will be less heavily protected, allowing the party a shot at him.

As Dark Star, Stella has occasionally made contact with the city's other gangs, usually through intermediaries. If any of the River Rats (or at least their leader) still survive, they might be persuaded to set up a joint attack with the Black Hearts—but both gangs are going to need a big payoff to take such a chance.

Rumble

Dark Star arranges with the Black Hearts to make a show of force in a section of the riverfront abutting Stumpton, where the River Rats and the Bloody Knives have been feuding for influence. Unknown to the Black Hearts or River Rats, this "show of force" is just a decoy assault intended to give the adventurers a shot at Sven. For his part, once he learns of the massing gang members along the riverfront, Sven musters a large force of Bloody Knives and sends them on the attack. This plays directly into Stella's plan, as it leaves the gang's headquarters lightly defended—perfect for the heroes to stage a strike against Sven, who she knows will stay behind. Stella provides directions to the Bloody Knives' hideout if the PCs haven't already learned that information.

Tactical Encounter: R7. Rumble (page 84).

Whether or not the PCs manage to slay Sven, they reveal the existence of a dragon infiltrating the city's gangs and disrupt Blade's plans as a result. This revelation is sure to cause a sensation—not least among gang members, who didn't know that a dragon had assumed Sven's place. Although a few close associates might have noticed Sven was behaving differently of late, many had no inkling of the substitution. The revelation causes disarray in the Bloody Knives, greatly weakening the gang. Any dragon-infused heavies who survive no longer have a coordinator and leave the city.

Aftermath

Lady Stella produces evidence connecting the mercenary patrols with the gang, which completely discredits Lord Erinblad. He is seen as a fool at best and a collaborator at worst, and he is forced to resign from the Circle. The mercenaries are driven out of town (positively identified gangsters might be arrested), and the city watch is restored.

Lady Stella's star is ascendant once again. The noblewoman pays the party the agreed-upon reward and hails them as saviors of the city. From this point on, the PCs have a powerful and generous patron in Lady Stella. The safety of Barrinsgate is in her best interest, and she will likely have need of bold heroes again. But the story isn't quite over . . .

Epilogue: Strange Encounter

As the PCs are leaving the council chambers to return to their quarters or are on the road out of the city, they meet a lone figure: a young female tiefling in silvery garments.

She makes no hostile moves but simply says, "Take a message to my sister: She may have won this time, but we are not done."

She then blinks out of sight. In the distance, a huge winged form lifts into the sky and quickly flies away.

R1. Shantytown Ambush

Encounter Level 10 (2,700 XP)

Setup

8 thugs (T)
2 dragon-infused gangsters (G)
1 Bloody Knives lieutenant (L)

The PCs arrive at Barrinsgate in response to the summons and must traverse the shantytown that has grown up around its gate.

When the PCs enter, read:

The crowded, stinking streets of the shantytown are slippery with sewage and choked with garbage. Ragged children of half a dozen races run through the warrens, mutilated beggars cry, and half-starved dogs slink aside as you make your way through this sea of misery.

Perception Check
DC 21: *What you had taken for more vagrants suddenly move toward you, weapons raised.*

If the PCs fail to notice the ambushers, they are surprised. The ruffians have been waiting for the party's arrival and cannot be surprised.

Streetwise Check
DC 16: *The shantytown is a warren of narrow, trash-strewn passages.*

8 Thugs (T) **Level 8 Minion Brute**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 88
Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +4
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 20; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 19
Speed 6
⨁ **Morningstar** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 7 damage.
⨽ **Beatdown** (standard; requires combat advantage; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 7 damage, and the thug knocks the target prone.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Str 17 (+7) **Dex** 16 (+7) **Wis** 10 (+4)
Con 12 (+5) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 14 (+6)
Equipment leather armor, morningstar

2 Dragon-Infused Gangsters (G) **Level 10 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, half-orc XP 500
Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +10
HP 104; **Bloodied** 52
AC 24; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 120
Speed 6
⨁ **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+16 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.
⨁/⨂ **Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+15 vs. AC; 1d4 + 5 damage.
⨽ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will)
The gangster makes a longsword attack and a dagger attack.
⨽ **Steely Resolve** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
+14 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 10 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.
Furious Assault (free, when the dragon-infused gangster hits an enemy; encounter)
The gangster's attack deals 1d10 extra damage.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Giant
Skills Athletics +15
Str 20 (+10) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 10 (+5)
Con 16 (+8) **Int** 10 (+5) **Cha** 8 (+4)
Equipment leather armor, longsword, 3 daggers

Tactics

The thugs look for flanking opportunities or exploit the lieutenant's *bloody brand* power.

The dragon-infused gangsters focus on a target, using *furious assault* to land a finishing blow after dealing damage with another attack against a bloodied target. They use *steely resolve* to drive enemies into situations where the thugs can flank them.

The lieutenant directs the actions of the others, using her combat powers to keep the most dangerous enemy off balance. She seizes the better part of valor once she is bloodied or half the attackers are down, tumbling away or using *slash and dash* to escape melee.

The ambushers have no compunctions about using innocent bystanders as human shields if necessary, or about making attacks that hurt nearby beggars and urchins.

Development

The lieutenant has a deep scar on her left cheek that extends into the hairline, and her left ear is mangled. Any character who engages her in combat notes this detail.

Bloody Knives Lieutenant (L) Level 10 Elite Soldier
Medium natural humanoid, half-elf XP 1,000

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +12
HP 212; **Bloodied** 106
AC 26; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⨺ **Bastard Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+17 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the lieutenant's next turn.

⨺/➴ **Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 5/10; +17 vs. AC; 2d6 + 6 damage.

⨺ **Bloody Brand** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
+17 vs. AC; 2d10 + 6 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 damage and grants combat advantage (save ends both).
Miss: Half damage.

⨺/➴ **Slash and Dash** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The Bloody Knives lieutenant makes a bastard sword attack, shifts 2 squares, and makes a dagger attack against a different target.

⨺ **Bloody Blade Riposte** (immediate reaction, when hit by a melee attack; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
+16 vs. AC; targets triggering enemy; 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the lieutenant's next turn.

Combat Tumbleset (move; encounter)
The lieutenant shifts its speed, and can shift through enemies' squares during this movement, but must end the move in an unoccupied space.

Combat Advantage
The lieutenant deals 1d8 extra damage to any creature granting combat advantage to it.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven, Goblin
Skills Acrobatics +13, Diplomacy +13, Stealth +13
Str 16 (+8) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 18 (+8) **Int** 13 (+6) **Cha** 16 (+8)
Equipment leather armor, bastard sword, 6 daggers

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light during the day; at night, flickering trash fires provide dim light.

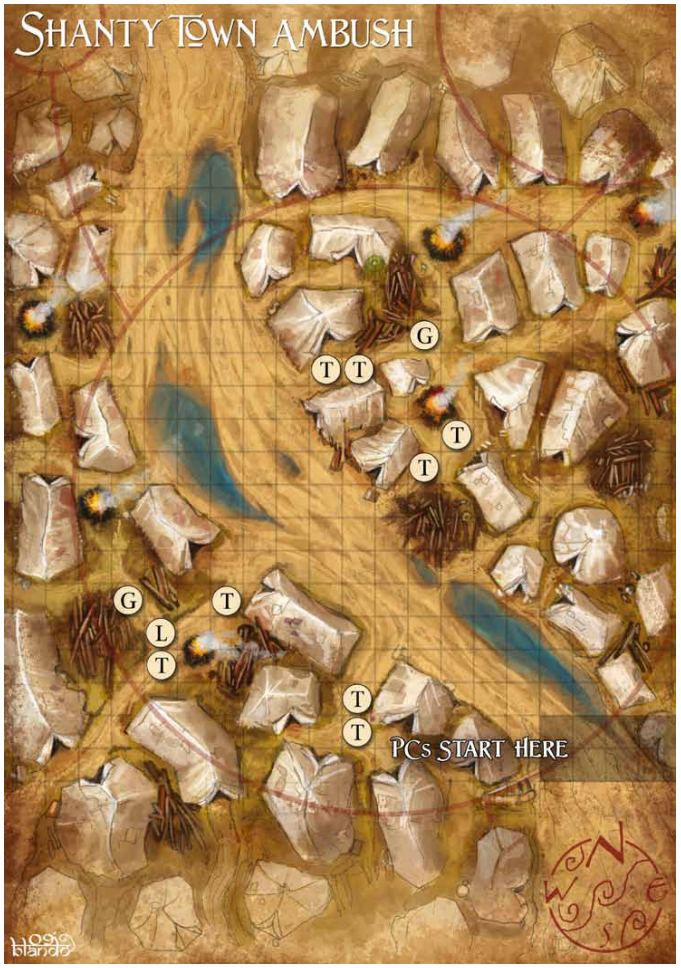
Bonfire: A creature that enters or starts its turn in a square containing a bonfire takes 1d6 fire damage.

Sludge Puddles: These areas of sewage and other waste are slick and dangerous. A creature that enters a square containing a sludge puddle must make a DC 16 Acrobatics check to maintain its balance. On a success, the creature continues its move. A failure by 4 or less causes the creature to slip; treat that square as difficult terrain. Failing by 5 or more means the creature falls prone in that square.

Trash Heaps: These piles are difficult terrain. As a move action, a creature can transfer a trash heap occupying 1 square into an adjacent square. Chunks of trash can be thrown as improvised ranged weapons.

Huts: The wretched hovels of the shanty-town have been cobbled together from scrap lumber, old barrels, bits of hide, and the like. A DC 16 Strength check can break through a hut's wall.

The flimsy huts are extremely flammable, and an attack that deals fire damage to a square containing a hut ignites that square on a roll of 1 on a d6. At the start of each round thereafter, roll a d6 for each hut square adjacent to that square; the fire spreads to the new square on a roll of 1. A burning hut square goes out on a roll of 6. Treat a burning square as a bonfire (see above).



R2. The Negotiation

Encounter Level 12 (3,500 XP)

At this initial meeting, the dragon wants to get a feel for the adventurers' mettle and establish some basic ground rules for negotiations. Her office enjoys typical security measures, including a permanent Eye of Warding, but she suspects some sort of insider leak; once she is satisfied with their merits, she requests a private meeting with her potential employees in the privacy of her home.

Lady Stella is much older than even her eladrin shape enables her to appear. She is calm, collected, and distant, even if inwardly concerned. For someone who rose to power as a bandit leader, she also seems sophisticated and well read. Give the PCs cool stares and allow her long pauses after questions to convey this to the heroes. They should feel intimidated and a little out of their league with Lady Stella.

The PCs might already know something of the Bloody Knives' involvement (having learned it from a minion or perhaps through a ritual such as History Revealed). If they inform Lady Stella of this fact during the course of the skill challenge or ensuing conversation, she is taken aback, although she covers her surprise and discomfort well. (A DC 21 passive Insight check reveals the slightest double take.) She doesn't understand why the Knives would attack the party and dares not inform the PCs of her involvement with the gang. This information makes her more insistent on shadowing a watch patrol to be certain of the attackers' identities.

The Negotiation **Level 12**
Skill Challenge 3,500 XP

This is a sequential skill challenge in which success in one portion leads to a followup test. During the challenge, the PCs must demonstrate their competence, negotiate a price, and come up with a plan of action.

The challenge uses stages to reflect the characters' progress during the negotiation, measured by the total number of successes they accrue. Some skills can be used at any time, while others are suited only to specific points in the discussion.

Complexity
2 (6 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills
Diplomacy, Insight, Streetwise

Diplomacy DC 16 (1 success, maximum 4 successes)
The character demonstrates an ability to adjust his or her attitude according to the social situation rather than simply bulling ahead. This skill can be used to gain up to 4 successes. After that, Lady Stella is sufficiently impressed that further Diplomacy checks do not contribute to overcoming the challenge.

Insight DC 16 (1 success, maximum 1 success per stage; see below)
Lady Stella plays things very close to the vest, but the character senses what she prizes most dearly and turns the discussion toward that topic, eliciting a less guarded response. This skill can be used to gain 1 success in each stage.

Streetwise DC 16 (1 success, maximum 1 success per stage; see below)
The character describes his or her experience in dealing with the criminal underworld, especially since arriving in Barrinsgate. If the PCs undertook basic inquiries into the gangs of the city before meeting with Lady Stella, this skill check is made with a +2 bonus. This skill can be used to gain 1 success in each stage.

Secondary Skills
Perception

Perception DC 21 (0 successes, no maximum)
Noting the furnishings of Lady Stella's office and her private salon, the character draws conclusions about her interests. A success on this check does not contribute to overcoming the challenge but grants a +2 bonus to Insight skill checks.

Stage 1: Proving Your Worth

As a potential employer, Lady Stella hopes to ascertain whether the PCs are truly skilled enough to take on this assignment. They must convince her of their competence before the negotiation can proceed further.

Lady Stella thanks you for accepting her invitation and looks you over with a merchant's eye.

Primary Skills
Bluff, History

Bluff DC 21 (1 success, maximum 1 success)
The character plays up his or her experience, embellishing past exploits. Lady Stella is a consummate bargainer and enjoys a spirited haggling session. After the first success, further attempts cause Lady Stella to see through self-aggrandizing efforts and results in an automatic failure—she nods and smiles but no longer seems quite as easy to convince.

History DC 16 (1 success, maximum 1 success)
The character relates something about the history of Barrinsgate and its gangs, showing Lady Stella that the PCs have the skills and patience to conduct research and have prepared for this meeting. This skill can be used to gain 1 success in this stage.

Stage 2: Down to Brass Tacks

After 2 successes in this skill challenge, Lady Stella is convinced that the party can handle this task. Now it's time to talk turkey.

Lady Stella gives a small, satisfied nod. "You seem competent as investigators. I am sure we can arrive at suitable remuneration for your services."

Primary Skills
Arcana, Intimidate, Thievery

Arcana DC 16 (1 success, maximum 1 success)
The character demonstrates arcane prowess at gathering information through spells, rituals, and research.

Intimidate DC 16 (1 success, maximum 1 success)
The character hints broadly at competing offers and implies that Lady Stella's might not be the most attractive.

Thievery DC 21 (1 success, maximum 1 success)
The character deftly produces a small object lifted from the councilor's office, such as a pen or candle snuffer, noting that these skills can procure other such clues.

Secondary Skills
Dungeoneering, Stealth

Dungeoneering or **Stealth** DC 16 (0 successes, maximum 1 success per stage)
The character explains that expertise in skulking about and avoiding hazards, especially in the literal underground, can be helpful in negotiating the figurative depths of the criminal underground. A success on this check does not contribute to overcoming the challenge but grants a +2 bonus to Streetwise skill checks.

Stage 3: The Next Step

After 2 more successes in this skill challenge (4 total), the PCs have negotiated a mutually satisfactory payment. However, Stella has strong ideas about how to proceed, and the PCs must get her to see things from another point of view to investigate as they see fit.

Lady Stella leans back. "You are hard bargainers, adventurers, but I think you will be worth the price. The situation is urgent, but it is also of an extremely sensitive nature. I would prefer not to discuss the particulars in this somewhat public location. Please meet with me privately at my home this evening after supper."

If the party incurred no failures in the first stage of this challenge, or if the players roleplayed that encounter exceptionally well, Lady Stella invites the PCs to dine with her first. Once they arrive at her home and enter her private salon, read or paraphrase the following.

A servant leads you to a high-ceilinged, spacious drawing room, decorated far more lavishly than the councilor's office. Gorgeous works of art hang from the walls, and sturdy sculptures decorate other surfaces. The room has no windows. You sense a frisson of arcane energy as you pass the threshold, a sure sign of magical warding, and the servant quietly closes the doors behind you.

Lady Stella occupies an antique divan, stroking a long-haired white cat, but her tense face belies the apparent ease of her posture. A number of comfortable chairs are drawn up in a circle around her couch, some of which are occupied by cats of various descriptions; other cats doze in various corners.

The noblewoman motions for you to sit. "Don't worry about dislodging my pets," she says. "There are many other comfortable places for them." She scratches behind the ears of the cat in her lap.

Primary Skills
Arcana, Diplomacy, Endurance, Nature

Arcana or **Nature** DC 16 (1 success, maximum 1 success)
The character realizes that one of the cats is behaving in a manner contrary to its nature or seems strangely attentive to the discussion, and points this out to Lady Stella. She is unwilling to believe that her pets have been compromised, but a successful check convinces her to have all the cats removed from the chamber. She takes the party's position more seriously. Only 1 success can be gained in this way.

Diplomacy DC Special (1 success, maximum 1 success)
The first time in this stage that a character attempts this action, make the check opposed by Lady Stella's Diplomacy (she has a skill check bonus of +18). If Lady Stella wins, this does not count as a failure, but the DCs of all further skill checks in this challenge are increased by 2. If the PC wins, the DCs remain unchanged and the party accrues 1 success.

Endurance DC 16 (1 success, maximum 1 success)
Lady Stella can be stubborn, but simply outlasting her in the discussion can help the PCs' case.

Secondary Skill
Perception

Perception DC 21 (0 success, maximum 1 success)
The character's observation of the room and the cats raises his or her suspicions. Something about their general movements isn't quite right. A successful check grants a +2 bonus to Arcana or Nature checks during this stage.

Conclusion
The PCs negotiate payment and receive assignments based on the degree of success. Once the challenge ends, Lady Stella bids them good night, and the party can proceed to planning their next actions.

Victory
If the PCs attain six successes, they earn a respectable payment and are able to proceed as they think best.

Defeat
If the PCs earn 3 failures, determine their total number of successes up to that point.
If they failed in the first stage of the challenge, the dragon is not certain of the PCs' ability and assigns them a test: shadowing a watch patrol to forestall another ambush and learn more about the attackers. If they perform satisfactorily, this negates 1 failure and negotiations pick up where they left off.
If they succeeded in the first step, Lady Stella finds them suitable for the task but is unwilling to pay them as much as they demand. See the "Getting Paid" sidebar.
If they succeeded in the second step, she is willing to pay well but dictates the party's next course of action, most likely shadowing a patrol.

CATSPAW

As evidenced by her eyepatch and her house full of pets, Stella has a weakness for (some would say an obsession with) cats. Blade has taken advantage of this situation to introduce her own cat familiar into the household (in humanoid guise, she convinced a servant to take in a pathetic-looking stray). This spy overheard Stella dictating the message to the PCs as and repeated what it heard to its master, allowing her to arrange the shantytown ambush.

The familiar continues to observe and report on a regular basis, through a Sending ritual performed by Blade each midnight. As a purported stray, the cat still is allowed to prowl. It makes a terrible fuss, and the servant who first brought it to the household often gives in to its complaints and lets it out at night. (This lets it get outside magically warded areas). Sometimes, though, it needs to get close to its master for detailed communication.

R3. The Investigation

Encounter Level 12 (3,500 XP)

The heroes are off into the unsafe streets of Barrinsgate, attempting to do Lady Stella's bidding and discover the cause of the unrest in town.

The Investigation **Level 12**
Skill Challenge 3,500 XP

This is a structured skill challenge in which the actions taken and the number of successes gained determine the direction the investigation takes. Depending on which lines of inquiry the PCs follow up and how well they do so, any or all of the following scenes might take place.

Success and Failure

This challenge does not follow the normal rules: Successful skill checks help the characters accomplish interim goals but don't accrue toward a final goal for the challenge. Likewise, failures don't determine the end point of the challenge but measure how much more difficult gathering information becomes. The challenge ends when the characters accomplish the adventure's goal.

Victory

Party members might try different skills separately, or the entire party might pursue one course of action at a time. Count the number of successes using a given skill or group of skills: The result dictates the next encounter area or development.

Defeat

When the characters fail skill checks, they draw some amount of attention to themselves, and the leader of the Bloody Knives might take action against them.

Keep track of the failures the characters accrue over the course of the challenge. Failures are cumulative, so each time they reach one of the following milestones, they suffer all the consequences for the number of failures they've accrued, including those for fewer failures.

Three or more failures: Sven instructs his followers to lean on shopowners and other businesses. Increase the DC of all Perception checks by 2 in areas controlled by the Bloody Knives.

Four or more failures: The gang starts breaking legs. Increase the DC of all Intimidate and Streetwise checks by 2 in areas controlled by the Bloody Knives. However, the tension in the streets becomes palpable. Decrease the DC of Insight checks in those areas by 2.

Five or more failures: Sven posts lookouts, interfering with the PCs' activities. Increase the DC of all Acrobatics and Athletics checks by 2 in areas controlled by the Bloody Knives.

Six or more failures: Sven attacks the PCs before they get any closer. See the "Optional Encounter: Public Enemies" sidebar on page 70 for details.

Primary Skills

Insight, Nature, Perception, Streetwise, special

Insight DC 16 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)

The character reads body language and observes interpersonal dynamics in city districts to get a sense of the tension level.

Two Successes: The character senses that the Bloody Knives might attack again soon. Go to "Watch Out!" on page 69.

Nature DC 10 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)

PCs who noticed the cat's suspicious behavior during the meeting with Stella might decide to observe it. At your discretion, the character can use Arcana instead (DC 16).

One Success: The cat leaves the house and prowls the streets. At one point, it stops and sits for several minutes. Then it returns to the house. It might repeat this action several times over a couple of nights to ensure the heroes take notice.

Two Successes: The cat leaves the house and heads out of the neighborhood. It stops periodically as though listening, then continues. Eventually it arrives at an abandoned warehouse and slips inside. The cat is leading the characters into a trap. Go to "Abandoned Warehouse" on page 67.

Perception DC 16 (1 success, maximum 3 successes)

The character tracks the movements of gang members. Which gang depends on the district investigated.

One success: The character learns the general area of the gang's headquarters.

Two successes: The character discovers the location of the gang's headquarters.

Three successes: The character observes the activities of the gang members. This familiarity means the character (or the party if he or she is with them) cannot be surprised by gang attacks, although it confers no advantage against traps.

Streetwise DC 16 (1 success, maximum 4 successes)

The character tries to talk with shopowners, innkeepers, or shadier customers to determine the level of gang activity, especially that of the Bloody Knives.

Two Successes: The party picks up a lead on an imminent criminal transaction. The information points to a construction site in the Campfire district, near the boundary with the market. The meeting is to be held the next night, after construction work has ceased for the day. If the PCs decide to investigate, go to "Hard Hat Area" on page 68.

Four Successes: Further inquiries turn up a disturbing fact: A couple of people were nosing around asking similar questions a few weeks ago. Several days later, their bodies were found in the river. Having been so alerted, the party gains a +2 bonus to Insight and Perception checks during this challenge. (If the PCs manage to retrieve a corpse and perform Speak with Dead, they can learn that the attackers wore red bandannas and were led by a woman with a scarred face.)

Ritual Special (1 success, maximum 1 success)

The character might choose to talk to a deceased watch soldier using Speak with Dead; Lady Stella insists on it if the party failed the negotiation skill challenge. She provides component costs and a ritual scroll if necessary. Go to "From the Horse's Mouth" on page 67.

Secondary Skills

Acrobatics, Athletics, Bluff, Intimidate, Thievery, special

Acrobatics/Athletics DC 16 (0 successes, no maximum)

The character takes to the rooftops to observe watch patrols or areas of likely trouble. A successful check negates a failure with a Streetwise or Perception check.

Bluff DC 21 or **Thievery** DC 16 (1 success, maximum 1 success)

The character puts out word in the underworld that he or she needs to move an interesting item he or she has "acquired." Word eventually reaches the Bloody Knives, who contact Lady Stella in her Dark Star persona. She encourages the gang to size up the prospective sellers, granting an automatic success with one Streetwise check.

Intimidate DC 21 (0 successes, no maximum)

The character tries leaning on shady sorts. However, Sven's people are already applying pressure. A successful check grants a +2 bonus to the next Streetwise check made as part of this challenge (only once per Intimidate check).

Ritual Special (0 successes, no maximum)

Using Whispers of the Edifice (*Arcane Power* 158) to check the abandoned warehouse (page 67) before entering reveals one or more of the following data points: No one other than the cat has entered in the last 24 hours; it was used to store flour; people rarely come in, except the occasional vagrant seeking shelter. This information alerts the character to the likelihood of a trap (+2 bonus to Perception checks to spot hidden gangsters).

Ritual Special (0 successes, no maximum)

Object Reading used on a weapon from the watch ambush provides images of the fight, such as the distinctive hoodlum or the headbands. The information is sufficient to identify the attackers, though not as detailed as what the patroller's spirit can tell them (see R6, Patrol Ambush).

R4. Burning Warehouse

Encounter Level 12 (3,500 XP)

During this skill challenge, the PCs must find a way out of the blockaded and burning warehouse before they are roasted alive or blown apart. The first round of the challenge begins once the timbers are lit, dealing damage (see the "Time Pressure" sidebar).

Perception Check (passive)

DC 16: *The warehouse seems abandoned. Broken crates and barrels are piled about a decrepit wagon, and similar rubbish is heaped around the walls.*

DC 21: *A skulking figure is barely visible in a shadowed alley.*

Burning Warehouse **Level 12**
Skill Challenge 3,500 XP

You've managed to follow the creature you suspect is more than just a simple cat. But as you hunt the shadows for the creature, you hear a loud crash followed immediately by the roar of flames!

Four Bloody Knives thugs and two dragon-infused gangsters are hidden in nearby alleys, watching the PCs approach. A gang lieutenant is prone on the roof, observing the door. If the PCs enter the building, the gangsters quickly move to close and bar the door, blocking it with a wagon full of rubbish. The lieutenant then lights a trash heap piled on top of the exit to the roof, whose timbers have been soaked in oil, and leaps or climbs down. The blaze quickly spreads through the dry wood while the inside of the building begins filling with smoke. Worse yet for the PCs, the building was formerly used to store sacks and kegs of flour. The fine and highly flammable dust is still present in high volume in the air, ready to explode.

Complexity

3 (8 successes before 3 failures).

Special

Time Pressure: Each round after the blaze is initially lit, the interior of the warehouse grows hotter and smokier, with flaming debris falling from above. At the start of the first round, each creature in the warehouse takes 1d8 fire damage. The damage increases to 2d8 the next round, and so on each round (maximum 5d8).

On the first round after the fire is lit, only the ceiling is burning. On each subsequent round, the fire moves 1 square down the walls until, after 5 rounds, the entire structure is aflame.

Primary Skills

Athletics, Endurance, Heal, Thievery, special

Athletics DC 21 (standard action, 1 success, no maximum)

The character tries to push or lever open a blocked exit. Up to two other characters can assist this check. A success partially shifts the blockage but does not open the exit completely. Each success at the same exit helps widen an opening in this way.

However, pushing against a burning surface deals 1d8 fire damage unless the character uses an object to extend his or her reach or protects his or her hands (see Heal below).

Endurance DC 16 (minor action, 1 success per group, maximum 1 success per round)

The hot, choking air threatens to overwhelm the party. Once per round, this skill check must be attempted by each character at the start of the round. Score1 success if at least half the group succeeds. Otherwise, each character loses a healing surge.

Heal DC 16 (standard action, 1 success, maximum 1 success per round)

The character uses first aid to reduce the ongoing threat from the smoke and heat: keeping people close to the floor, creating impromptu filters with damp cloths, and so forth. This skill can be used to gain 1 success per round.

Alternatively, a successful Heal check represents wrapping a character's hands so he or she can push against a burning surface without taking damage for 1 round.

Thievery DC 16 (standard action, 1 success, maximum 1 success per round)

The building's walls contain several small openings for light and ventilation. Although they are too small for any creature larger than Tiny to pass through, using thieves' tools or an improvised crowbar expands an opening a bit to allow more fresh air in. This skill can be used to gain 1 success per round.

Strength DC 26 or DC 21 (special, 1 success)

The character starts to break through a wall. An area that is burning requires only a DC 21 check. Attacking a burning section of wall deals 1d6 points of fire damage to any character adjacent to that section of wall from flying flinders of burning lumber.

Secondary Skills

Acrobatics, Athletics, Perception, Streetwise, special

Acrobatics DC 16 (standard action, 0 successes, no maximum)

The character hooks a rope around a roof beam and swings up to the burning ceiling. On subsequent rounds, he or she can make Strength checks (see above) to lift the trapdoor (DC 21) or break through the weakened roof timbers (DC 26), with a +2 bonus to the check.

At the DM's discretion, the character can instead make a DC 16 Athletics check to climb a support beam to reach the ceiling.

Perception DC 10 (standard action, 0 or 1 success, maximum 0 or 1 success)

The character inspects broken barrels and old sacks in the warehouse and discovers that they contain flour. Informing the others of the imminent hazard urges them to greater efforts. A successful skill check grants a +2 bonus to the next round's Endurance checks or converts one failed Athletics check into a success. Perception can be used in this way only once during the challenge.

Streetwise DC 16 (minor action, 0 successes, no maximum)

The character's knowledge of warehouse construction lets him or her make educated guesses about weak points in the building's structure, granting a +2 bonus to the next Strength or Athletics check.

Cold Powers Special (action as power, 0 successes, no maximum)

Using a close or area power that deals cold damage slows the spread of the flames, reducing the fire damage dealt at the start of the following round by 1d8.

Rituals Special (minor action, 0 successes, no maximum)

A character who has previously performed the Affect Normal Fire ritual (*PH2* page 212) can take a minor action to extinguish 1 square of fire. Spending two consecutive minor actions reduces the fire damage dealt at the start of the following round by 1d8.

Rituals and powers that reduce fire damage are cumulative. If these effects reduce the fire damage dealt in a round to 0, the fire is extinguished.

Victory

If the PCs get 8 successes, they escape the warehouse before it explodes. Depending on their actions, they might be able to put out the fire. The lieutenant stays around after the fire is lit to make sure the job gets done. If the PCs escape quickly (in 3 rounds or fewer), they might be able to spot and catch him before he can report.

Failure

If the characters accumulate 3 failures, the flour dust ignites before they can escape. Each creature inside the warehouse takes 3d8 + 7 fire damage. In addition, the building collapses.

Close burst 10; targets creatures in the warehouse; +16 vs. Reflex; ongoing 10 damage, and the target is restrained (save ends both).

Another creature can free a restrained one by taking a DC 16 Strength check as a standard action.

Any creature outside the warehouse but within 2 squares of it takes half the fire damage dealt; if hit by the Reflex attack, he or she is knocked prone instead of restrained and takes no ongoing damage. The gang lieutenant might attack badly injured or prone PCs.

Development

If a character notices the hidden gangsters, one or more PCs might try to engage them. The gangsters do not offer battle in this case but scatter into the streets, taking roundabout paths back to the gang's headquarters. They wear Bloody Knives colors (a red bandanna).

If not all the PCs enter the building, the gangsters take action if only one or two remain outside. They try to surprise and overpower such lookouts; a couple of thugs close and block the doors as planned, then join the fight. The lieutenant starts the fire and then either joins the fight or runs off, depending on the progress of the combat. You can use the city streets map from encounter R6 or create one of your own.

A character might try to scale the roof. The lieutenant takes cover behind the trash heap (becoming hidden) and waits for a chance to quickly engage and overpower the character. He uses *bloody brand*, lights the fire as a minor action, then spends an action point on *slash and dash*.

The gangsters also follow these tactics against a character who teleports out of the burning building.

R5. Construction Site

Encounter Level 12 (3,500 XP)

Setup

1 industrial automaton

The PCs approach the construction site expecting to crash a gang meet but instead activate the tampered construct.

When the PCs approach, read:

The construction site is deserted, dark, and quiet. An enormous machine looms over a deep pit flanked by heaps of building materials and scaffolding. It resembles a cross between a crane and a siege tower, with massive arms. One ends in a clenched fist and the other a shovel.

Arcana Check
DC 21: *You sense something not quite right about the immense construct. It seems . . . alert.*

When the PC whose item has been keyed to the automaton approaches within 5 squares of it, read:

The huge automaton suddenly activates and attacks!

Unless the PCs succeed on the Arcana check or tracked the item previously stolen (see page 65), they are surprised.

Industrial Automaton **Level 12 Solo Brute**
Huge natural animate (construct) XP 3,500
Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +6
HP 516; **Bloodied** 258
AC 24; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 22
Saving Throws +5
Speed 6 (cannot shift)
Action Points 2

⊕ **Hammerhand** (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +15 vs. AC; 2d12 + 4 damage (2d12 + 9 while bloodied), and the target is knocked prone and grabbed. Sustain Minor: The automaton sustains the grab, and the target takes 10 damage. The automaton cannot make hammerhand attacks while grabbing a creature.

⊕ **Shovel** (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +15 vs. AC; 2d8 + 8 damage (2d8 + 13 while bloodied), and the target is pulled 2 squares.

Automation Fury Attack (standard; at-will)
The industrial automaton makes two hammerhand attacks and two shovel attacks. Each attack must target a different creature.

Fling (immediate reaction, when hit by an attack; at-will)
Reach 3; targets the triggering enemy; +13 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 5 damage, the automaton slides the target 3 squares and knocks it prone.

Hoist (minor; usable only while the automaton has a creature grabbed; at-will)
Targets grabbed creature; +13 vs. Reflex; 2d12 + 8 damage (2d12 + 13 while bloodied), and the target is restrained (save ends) and no longer grabbed. Only one target can be restrained in this way at a time.

Trample (**standard**; at-will)
The automaton moves its speed and can enter enemies' spaces. The automaton makes an attack against each enemy whose space it enters: +13 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 10 damage (1d10 + 15 while bloodied), and the automaton slides the target 2 squares.

Death Burst (when the automaton drops to 0 hit points)
The automaton explodes in a shower of metal shards and loose gears: close burst 2; +15 vs. AC; 3d8 + 8 damage. *Miss:* Half damage.

Reverberate (when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Thunder**
+13 vs. Fortitude; 3d8 + 8 thunder damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends). Miss: Half damage.

Catapult (standard; at-will)
Area burst 1 within 10; +13 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 8 damage. The burst creates an area of difficult terrain that lasts until the end of the encounter.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 26 (+14) **Dex** 10 (+6) **Wis** 11 (+6)
Con 25 (+13) **Int** 3 (+2) **Cha** 3 (+2)

Tactics

The automaton stands at the west side of the building, as illustrated on the map. It focuses its attacks on the character to which it is keyed. It grabs and hoists other enemies that interfere with it, or tramples right through them. It smashes walls and scaffolding to get at a target taking cover and hurls shovelfuls of construction material at a creature that tries to stay out of reach.

The automaton does not stop attacking until it is destroyed.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light.

Pit: The building site is a 20-foot-deep pit that forms the basement of the building under construction. The partially built walls block much of it, but creatures can move through the various openings.

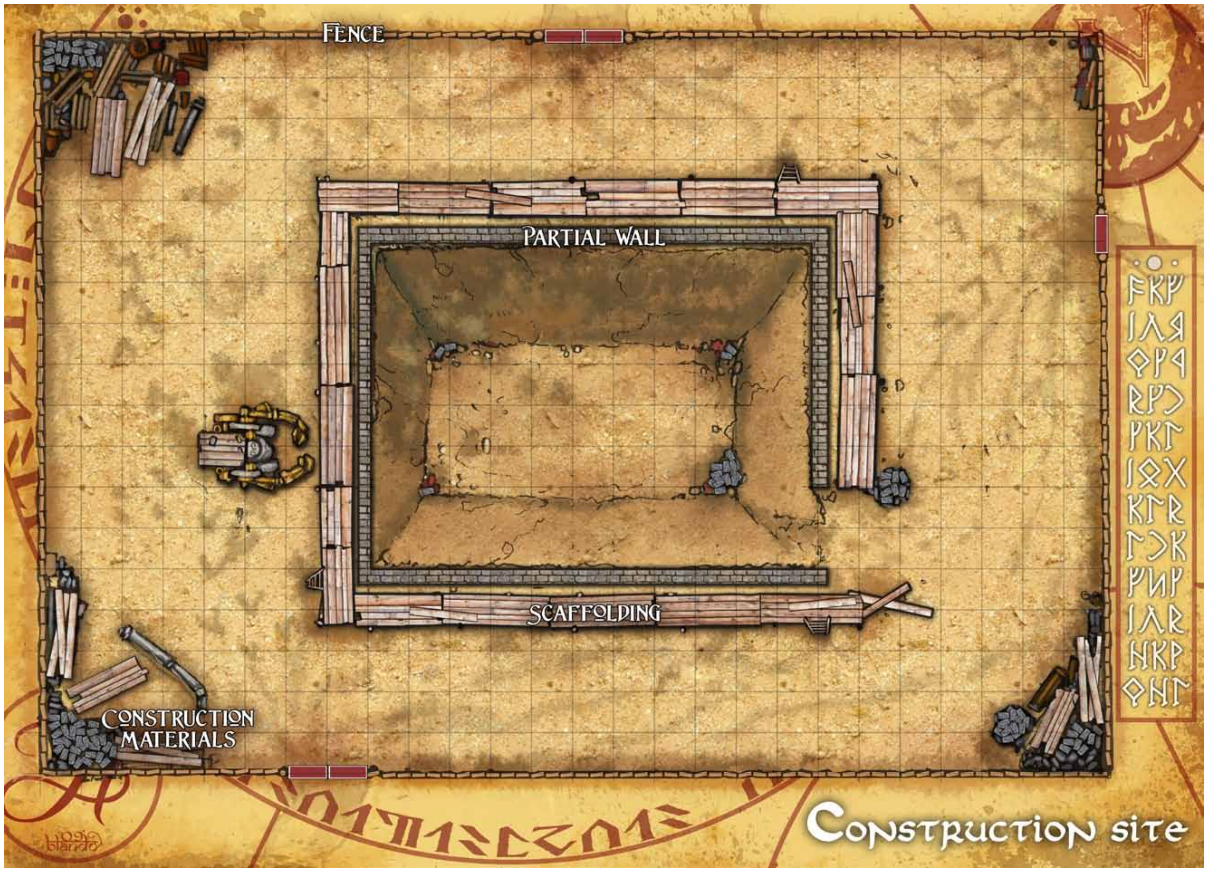
Construction Materials: Lumber and bricks are piled up around the building site. Each heap is about 10 feet high. Scrambling up a pile is awkward; treat each square as difficult terrain. A creature making attacks from above its target gains a +1 bonus to the attack roll. A creature can use planking as an improvised two-handed weapon; a brick can serve as an improvised thrown weapon.

Fence: A 10-foot-high wooden fence surrounds the construction site but provides privacy more than security. The timbers are easy to scale (Athletics DC 5) and do not withstand force well (per 1-square section: break DC 16; AC/Reflex 4, Fortitude 12, 20 hit points).

Scaffolding: Wooden scaffolding has been erected to a height of 20 feet around the building site where walls are under construction (per 1-square section: break DC 16; AC/Reflex 5, Fortitude 10, 20 hit points). Climbing onto the scaffolding requires a DC 10 Athletics check. A creature can climb just halfway up to a lower level at 10 feet. A creature making attacks from above its target gains a +1 bonus to the attack roll.

When a square of scaffolding is destroyed, the squares adjacent to it also break away, dealing 1d10 damage per 10 feet fallen to any creature below. A creature on the collapsed scaffolding takes falling damage.

Partial Walls: The walls of the building have been built to a height of 15 feet or so. They are supported by temporary joists but are not as solid as fully constructed walls; a DC 28 Strength check can knock over a 5-foot section of wall (AC/Reflex 4, Fortitude 12, 40 hit points). Climbing across a section of wall requires a DC 16 Athletics check.



R6. Patrol Ambush

Encounter Level 13 (4,000 XP)

Sven sends a group of heavies to attack a watch patrol.

Setup

6 watch patrollers (P)
1 watch sergeant (S)
6 dragon-infused gangsters (G)
1 Bloody Knives lieutenant (L)

If the PCs are stealthily tailing the patrol, the gangsters do not notice them before the attack and can be surprised. If the PCs are making no attempt to hide, though, the heroes are surprised at the attack.

When the PCs approach, read:

The noise of the city streets abates as citizens desert the area. They know a fight is coming. The patrollers adopt defensive stances, nervously watching for trouble.

6 Watch Patrollers (P) Level 8 Minion Soldier
Medium natural humanoid XP 88

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +4
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 23; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 19
Speed 5

⊕ **Glaive** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +15 vs. AC; 6 damage.

↓ **Stop in the Name of the Law** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +13 vs. Fortitude; 6 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the patroller's next turn.

Phalanx Soldier
The watch patroller gains a +2 bonus to AC while at least one watch patroller or watch sergeant is adjacent to it.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Str 15 (+6) **Dex** 14 (+6) **Wis** 10 (+4)
Con 14 (+6) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 12 (+5)
Equipment scale armor, glaive

Perception Check
DC 16 *The leader of the attackers has a scarred face and a torn ear.*

If the PCs killed that lieutenant, then they recognize one of the gangsters from a previous encounter instead.

Watch Sergeant (S) Level 10 Soldier (Leader)
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 500

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +12
HP 104; **Bloodied** 52
AC 26; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 22
Speed 5

⊕ **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+16 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the watch sergeant's next turn.

↓ **Line Support** (immediate reaction, when an enemy marked by the watch sergeant makes an attack that does not include the watch sergeant; at-will)
+16 vs. AC; targets triggering enemy; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.

➳ **Crossbow** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +14 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage.

Call to Arms (free; when first bloodied; encounter)
Close burst 10; targets allies; the target makes a melee basic attack or shifts 3 squares as a free action.

Phalanx Soldier
The watch patroller gains a +2 bonus to AC while at least one watch patroller or watch sergeant is adjacent to it.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Str 16 (+8) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 16 (+8) **Int** 13 (+6) **Cha** 16 (+8)
Equipment chainmail, longsword, crossbow, 10 bolts

Tactics

The gangsters move to take out the patrollers first, while the lieutenant pins down the sergeant. Once the PCs get involved, the gangsters double up on dangerous-looking opponents while the lieutenant directs their actions. These gangsters intended to leave no witnesses and fight until it becomes apparent that the battle is lost.

The patrollers form a tight circle or line up to close off an alleyway and take advantage of their *phalanx fighting* ability. The sergeant stands in the second rank, ready to strike out with *line support*.

6 Dragon-Infused Gangsters (G) Level 10 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid, half-orc XP 500

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +10
HP 104; **Bloodied** 52
AC 24; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 120
Speed 6

⊕ **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+16 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.

⊕/➳ **Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+15 vs. AC; 1d4 + 5 damage.

↓ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will)
The gangster makes a longsword attack and a dagger attack.

↓ **Steely Resolve** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
+14 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 10 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.

Furious Assault (free, when the dragon-infused gangster hits an enemy; encounter)
The gangster's attack deals 1d10 extra damage.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Giant
Skills Athletics +15
Str 20 (+10) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 10 (+5)
Con 16 (+8) **Int** 10 (+5) **Cha** 8 (+4)
Equipment leather armor, longsword, 3 daggers

Bloody Knives Lieutenant (L) Level 10 Elite Soldier
Medium natural humanoid, half-elf XP 1,000

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +12
HP 212; **Bloodied** 106
AC 26; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Bastard Sword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+17 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the lieutenant's next turn.

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 5/10; +17 vs. AC; 2d6 + 6 damage.

Bloody Brand (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
+17 vs. AC; 2d10 + 6 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 damage and grants combat advantage (save ends both).
Miss: Half damage.

Slash and Dash (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The Bloody Knives lieutenant makes a bastard sword attack, shifts 2 squares, and makes a dagger attack against a different target.

Bloody Blade Riposte (immediate reaction, when hit by a melee attack; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
+16 vs. AC; targets triggering enemy; 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the lieutenant's next turn.

Combat Tumbleset (move; encounter)
The lieutenant shifts its speed, and can shift through enemies' squares during this movement, but must end the move in an unoccupied space.

Combat Advantage
The lieutenant deals 1d8 extra damage to any creature granting combat advantage to it.

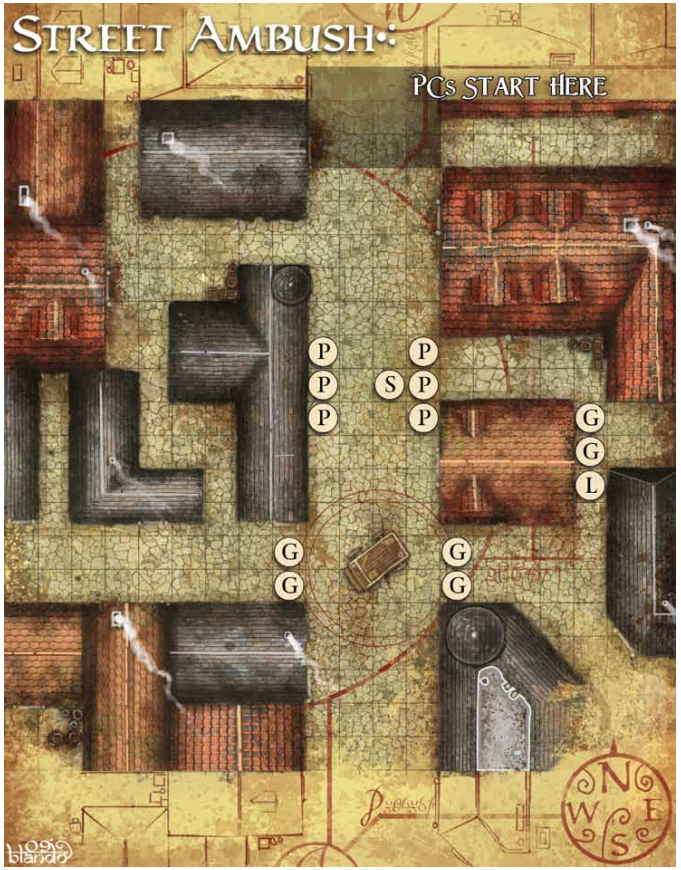
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven, Goblin
Skills Acrobatics +13, Diplomacy +13, Stealth +13
Str 16 (+8) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 18 (+8) **Int** 13 (+6) **Cha** 16 (+8)
Equipment leather armor, bastard sword, 6 daggers

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light.

Doors: Sensing a fight, the citizens have closed and barred the doors to public buildings (break DC 20; AC/Reflex 5, Fortitude 10, 20 hit points).

Fruit Cart: A street vendor fled, leaving behind a cart filled with various sorts of fruit. The cart provides cover, or superior cover to a prone creature. If the cart is pushed over (DC 16 Strength check) or is damaged by an area or close attack, fruit scatters in a blast 3; each square in the blast is difficult terrain until the end of the encounter or until a creature spends a standard action to clear the square. Fruit can be used as an improvised thrown weapon; on a hit, the sticky juice also imposes a –2 penalty to the target's next attack roll before the end of the attacker's next turn.



R7. RUMBLE

Encounter Level 14 (5,675 XP)

The PCs challenge Sven on his home ground.

Setup

Sven, adult mercury dragon (S)
3 dragon-infused gangsters (G)
2 crossbow thugs (T)

When the PCs approach, read:

Three tough-looking half-orcs bar the way into the squat manor house. All wear red neckerchiefs. A couple of crossbow-wielding gangsters patrol the roof.

The gangsters are alert and, unless the PCs can approach from an unexpected direction, cannot be surprised.

Perception Check
DC 16: *Inside the house is a slim, silver-haired male human.*

Tactics

The gangsters form a loose skirmish line, using *steely resolve* as often as possible to prevent attackers from closing with Sven. Against a determined advance or long-range attacks, they retreat behind the door and bar it.

The thugs on the roof guard against attempts to climb, using bull rush attacks to push off interlopers. They call out a warning against such intruders and then retreat through the trapdoor, which they bar behind them.

Sven readies his *frightful presence* power and waits for an opportunity to catch several PCs in the burst. He assumes his dragon form as a minor action and flies into melee position against a stunned character, then spends an action point to use *draconic fury*. On his next turn, he uses his breath weapon on as many heroes as possible, spends an action point to make another *draconic fury* attack against a target that grants him combat advantage (preferably the same target as before), and then flies back behind the skirmish line. Thereafter he looks for opportunities to exploit combat advantage, using his breath weapon whenever it is available. Sven saves *quicksilver form* to attempt a getaway through a window if he is reduced to one-quarter hit points.

Sven, Adult Mercury Dragon — **Level 13 Solo Lurker**
Large natural magical beast (dragon, shapechanger) XP 4,000

Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision
HP 516; **Bloodied** 258; see also *bloodied breath*
AC 27; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 23
Resist 20 poison
Saving Throws +5
Speed 7, fly 7 (hover), overland flight 10
Action Points 2

Bite (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 1d12 + 7 damage.

Claw (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage.

Draconic Fury (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; the dragon makes two claw attacks and one bite attack.

Quick Snap (immediate interrupt, when an enemy moves adjacent to the dragon; at-will)
The dragon makes a bite attack against the triggering enemy. On a hit, the target also grants combat advantage to the dragon (save ends).

Breath Weapon (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Poison**
Close blast 5; +16 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 4 poison damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and treats the mercury dragon as invisible (save ends both). *Miss:* Half damage.

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Poison**
Breath weapon recharges, and the dragon uses it.

Frightful Presence (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +16 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the dragon's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Quicksilver Form (move action; encounter) ✦ **Polymorph**
The dragon becomes a liquid wave of quicksilver and shifts 4 squares. It remains in its quicksilver form until the end of its next turn. While in quicksilver form, the dragon cannot attack or fly, but it gains a climb speed of 6, ignores difficult terrain, and doesn't provoke opportunity attacks. It can squeeze through any aperture a Tiny creature could fit through. The dragon can return to its normal form as a free action on its turn. When it returns to normal, each creature within 2 squares grants combat advantage to the dragon until the end of the dragon's next turn. *Sustain Minor:* The quicksilver form persists.

Change Shape (minor; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**
The dragon can alter its physical form to appear as any Medium or Large humanoid, including a unique individual (see "Change Shape," *MM2* 216).

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Acrobatics +17, Bluff +16, Stealth +17

Str 19 (+10)	**Dex** 23 (+12)	**Wis** 11 (+6)
Con 17 (+9)	**Int** 13 (+7)	**Cha** 20 (+11)

2 Crossbow Thugs (T) Level 8 Minion Brute
Medium natural humanoid XP 88

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +4
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 20; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 19
Speed 6

Morningstar (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 7 damage.

Crossbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +11 vs. AC; 7 damage.

Beatdown (standard; requires combat advantage; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 7 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Str 17 (+7) **Dex** 16 (+7) **Wis** 10 (+4)
Con 12 (+5) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 14 (+6)
Equipment leather armor, morningstar, crossbow and 10 bolts

3 Dragon-Infused Gangsters (G) Level 10 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid, half-orc XP 500

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +10
HP 104; **Bloodied** 52
AC 24; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 120
Speed 6

Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+16 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+15 vs. AC; 1d4 + 5 damage.

Double Attack (standard; at-will)
The gangster makes a longsword attack and a dagger attack.

Steely Resolve (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
+14 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 10 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.

Furious Assault (free, when the dragon-infused gangster hits an enemy; encounter)
The gangster's attack deals 1d10 extra damage.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Giant
Skills Athletics +15
Str 20 (+10) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 10 (+5)
Con 16 (+8) **Int** 10 (+5) **Cha** 8 (+4)
Equipment leather armor, longsword, 3 daggers

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light during the day; at night, dim light outside and bright light inside.

Door: The wooden front door is reinforced with iron straps (break DC 22; AC/Reflex 5, Fortitude 12, 30 hit points).

Roof: A steel-reinforced trapdoor allows access to the roof (break DC 25; AC/Reflex 8, Fortitude 10, 40 hit points).

Walls: The manor house has masonry walls (Climb DC 20, break DC 35).

Windows: The building's windows have been partially bricked up, making them too narrow for a creature larger than Tiny to pass through. However, they are easier to break than the masonry walls (DC 30).

Expeditionary Dispatches

Guardians of the Labyrinth

by James Wyatt ✦ illustrations by Wayne England

EBERRON

"You stand on cursed ground." The speaker was one of the orc trio, standing a little in front of the others. His voice carried a thick accent, but his Common was impeccable, like a well-rehearsed ritual. "You may proceed no farther into this place of evil, and you may not leave to spread its taint. I offer you a choice: commit your lives to the service of Kalok Shash and the holy calling of the Ghaash'kala, or die where you stand."

–Dragon Forge, Book 2 of the *Draconic Prophecies*

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Between the blasted wasteland of the Demon Wastes and the verdant forests of the Eldeen Reaches stand two barriers: the forbidding peaks of the mountain range called the Icehorns in the north and the Shadowcrags in the south, and the vast expanse of the Labyrinth. Although both are natural barriers that help protect the Reaches and the rest of Khorvaire from the evils of the Demon Wastes, the Labyrinth also holds protectors who have sworn their lives to protect the world from the fiends and terrors of the Wastes. These protectors are the Ghaash'kala.

As described in the *Eberron® Campaign Guide*, the Ghaash'kala, a loose federation of orc clans serve as the primary agents of good in the Demon Wastes. Devoted to a spiritual force called Kalok Shash, the Binding Flame, the Ghaash'kala believe their sacred duty is to keep the evils of the Demon Wastes contained, which protects the rest of the world from the corruption and destruction of the Lords of Dust and their minions.

History of the Ghaash'kala

"You know about the Ghaash'kala. They come from the same stock as the orcs of the Shadow Marches to the south, and once probably followed the same druidic traditions. Some wanderlust or calling led them to the Labyrinth. One legend claims that they were an army pushing back an invasion of the Carrion Tribes, so zealous in their cause that they chased their quarry back through the Labyrinth to the threshold of the Wastes. The more pious among them claim that the leaders were following the call of Kalok Shash, the binding flame, which drew them to the Labyrinth to continue the sacred work of warriors long since vanished from the land."

–Dragon Forge, Book 2 of the *Draconic Prophecies*

According to the priests of the Maruk clan, the Ghaash'kala was a single orc tribe that inhabited the Shadow Marches during the hegemony of the goblin Dhakaani empire. While the other tribes of the Marches followed primal ways, soon giving rise to the traditions of the Gatekeepers, the Ghaash'kala were proud warriors who adopted the irreligious ways of the goblins, trusting in their own strength over the aid of any supernatural forces.

The Maruk legends say that the Shadow Marches themselves turned against these early Ghaash'kala, perhaps because their rejection of the primal ways angered the spirits that inhabited the swamps of the Marches. No longer welcome in their home, the Ghaash'kala fled to the north, into the western expanse of the Towering Wood in what is now the Eldeen Reaches. They were no more welcome in the fey-haunted Twilight Demesne than they had been in the Shadow Marches, however, so they continued their flight into the Shadowcrags.

While they tried to adapt to their new mountainous home, the Ghaash'kala had to contend with the evils that spread out from the Demon Wastes in a constant, vile stream. Many Ghaash'kala warriors died when fiendish creatures attacked, and before long the Ghaash'kala began planning another flight, searching for another new home.

Then, the Maruk say, the Ghaash'kala first heard the voice of Kalok Shash. It spoke in the voice of the brave warriors who had died in defense of their people in their flight, imploring them not to let those warriors' deaths be in vain. It called them into the Labyrinth, taught them to navigate its hazards, and prepared them for its defense against the fiends of the Wastes.

The change in the Ghaash'kala was dramatic. They wholeheartedly adopted a life of rich spirituality, in which they enjoyed a close communion with the spirits of their departed warriors. With each fallen warrior, they proclaim, "Kalok Shash burns brighter."

Ghost Guardians

"Ghaarat," the priestess said, standing before the boy and looking solemnly into his eyes, "today you die. As a ghost, you will fight the demons of the Wastes and their human servants, the foul beasts and mighty warlords. You will fight until at last you have proved yourself worthy of joining Kalok Shash. Are you ready?"

"I am," young Ghaarat said, no hint of fear or hesitation in his voice.

–Dragon Forge, Book 2 of the *Draconic Prophecies*

The name Ghaash'kala means "ghost guardians," so it seems unlikely that it was truly the name of the tribe that fled the Shadow Marches. As those of the modern Ghaash'kala understand it, the name signifies that the adult warriors of the clans have already died. In their initiation rites, when they welcome children to adulthood or incorporate converts into their numbers, each initiate undergoes a symbolic death after swearing to fight evil in all its forms without fear, to allow nothing to pass through the Labyrinth. In the Maruk rites, an adult sponsor swings a sword, stopping a hair's breadth from the initiate's neck, and the initiate–now referred to as a ghost–is welcomed into the clan. The Jaasakah clan's rites involve imprisoning the initiate in a lightless cave for three days, after which the initiate emerges as a ghost warrior.

Ghaash'kala warriors believe they are already dead. They have given their lives to Kalok Shash and their clan–it no longer belongs to them, but to the protection of the Labyrinth. They are living ghosts,

privileged to spend their last, fleeting days on earth serving Kalok Shash and proving themselves worthy to join its holy flame. When a Ghaash'kala dies, the death is the completion of the spirit's journey from life to Kalok Shash, the Binding Flame.

The Ghaash'kala believe that everything in the Demon Wastes—including their own flesh—is irredeemably tainted by the evil of the place. To allow anything so tainted to leave the Wastes and potentially spread its taint beyond the borders of the Labyrinth is a failure in their sacred duty. A warrior who knowingly and willingly permits a fiend to leave the Wastes is subject to death.

Adult Ghaash'kala are warriors, and they live in a structured military society infused with a strong spirituality. Each of the four Ghaash'kala clans has two leaders: a military leader (called a *kizshmit*, or chieftain) and a spiritual leader (a high priest called a *sar'malaan*). The two leaders, like the two aspects of Ghaash'kala life, are closely intertwined. Initially, the high priest appoints the chieftain and then, once the chieftain takes the position, serves as his or her advisor. They claim absolute authority over their respective spheres of influence, but the chieftain defers to the high priest in cases where their authority might overlap. In the same way, the Ghaash'kala believe that their sacred duty to Kalok Shash is more important than mere survival or any military concern, so they defer to their spiritual beliefs in cases where these beliefs might conflict with their military interests.

The four clans of the Ghaash'kala are, at least according to legend, branches of the first Ghaash'kala tribe that fled the Shadow Marches. They are the Maruk ("Mighty"), who dwell in the central part of the Labyrinth, around Maruk Dar; the Jaasakah ("Deadly") of the east, including Ghaash Dar; the Kastar ("Swift") of the west; and the Vaanka ("Final"), who inhabit the northwest. At the heart of these ancient clans are a small cluster of orcs related by blood, but the clans replenish their numbers as much by initiating outsiders as by producing children. All four clans welcome outsiders, even outcast members of the Carrion Tribes, who profess and demonstrate a true faith in Kalok Shash. The Maruk offer a choice to travelers they intercept trying to traverse the Labyrinth: join us or die.

The Labyrinth

If the corruption, the distilled acidic evil of the Demon Wastes had corroded the earth, burning away what it touched and leaving a blackened, twisting residue, that residue might have resembled the Labyrinth. Mile upon mile of winding canyons, scorched plateaus, and jagged outcroppings stretched from the feet of the Shadowcrags as far as Kauth could see. On the horizon, only tall fires licking at the blood-red sky marked the land beyond the Labyrinth.

—Dragon Forge, Book 2 of the *Draconic Prophecies*

The Labyrinth might be a buffer between the unmitigated horror of the Demon Wastes and the rest of Khorvaire, but it is a part of the Wastes and no less treacherous. The darkness and chaos of Khyber lies close to the surface beneath the Labyrinth, and gouts of flame from the Dragon Below might spew up from the land to engulf unwary travelers. Chasms open suddenly, plunging deep into the earth, rivers of lava spill across the land, and cascading rockslides close off the canyons. On the rare occasions that rain pours down from the mountains, flash floods sweep through the Labyrinth.

If travelers aren't killed by the land, then they must contend with any number of terrible monsters. Most of the monsters of the Labyrinth are paragon-tier threats on par with the Carrion Tribes, rakshasas, and night hags that haunt the rest of the Wastes. Encounters in the Labyrinth might resemble any of the following examples:

Level 11 Encounter (XP 3,400)
- 2 oni mages (level 10 elite lurker; *Monster Manual*®, page 201)
- 1 lamia (level 12 elite controller; *Monster Manual*, page 174)

Level 15 Encounter (XP 6,000)
- 3 magma brutes (level 13 brute; *Monster Manual*, page 183)
- 2 salamander archers (level 15 artillery; *Monster Manual*, page 226)
- 1 salamander noble (level 15 controller; *Monster Manual*, page 227)

Level 19 Encounter (XP 12,400)
- 2 bodak reavers (level 18 soldier; *Monster Manual*, page 36)
- 1 larva mage (level 21 elite artillery; *Monster Manual*, page 175)
- 1 field of everflame (level 18 blaster hazard; *Dungeon Master's Guide*®, page 92)

As if the terrain, natural hazards, and monstrous denizens weren't enough, travelers through the Labyrinth also run the risk of getting lost. The Ghaash'kala know routes through the twisting canyons, but they can't account for the continual changes of the landscape. Navigating the Labyrinth can be modeled as a

skill challenge. Characters might use Nature to follow natural features and maintain their sense of direction, Arcana to steer clear of supernatural hazards, Athletics to navigate over obstacles, Perception to spot sudden hazards and Acrobatics to avoid them, Endurance to survive the stifling atmosphere, and Heal to help other characters who fail Endurance checks. Failed checks might cost characters healing surges and perhaps lead to encounters.

The Ghaash'kala

Ghaash'kala warriors are terrible foes, tempered in battle with some of the most dangerous monsters found in Khorvaire.

Ghaash'kala Defender **Level 15 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, orc XP 1,200
Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +12; low-light vision
HP 148; **Bloodied** 74
AC 31; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 27
Speed 5 (7 when charging)
⊕ **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+22 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the defender's next turn.
Binding Flame Strike (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire, Weapon**
+22 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 fire damage, and ongoing 10 fire damage; the target is slowed. If the target is marked by the defender or is already slowed, it is immobilized instead of slowed.
Warrior's Surge (standard, usable only while bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
The defender makes a melee basic attack and regains 37 hit points.
Alignment Lawful good **Languages** Common, Goblin
Skills Diplomacy +14, Intimidate +14, Religion +13
Str 23 (+13) **Dex** 17 (+10) **Wis** 21 (+12)
Con 20 (+12) **Int** 12 (+8) **Cha** 15 (+9)
Equipment chainmail armor, heavy shield, longsword

Ghaash'kala Defender Tactics

The Ghaash'kala defender gives in to its fury, charging the nearest enemy. Once engaged, it swings its longsword and follows up by channeling the Binding Flame into its enemy until nothing remains but ash.

Ghaash'kala Mystic **Level 17 Artillery (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, orc XP 1,600
Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +20; low-light vision
HP 129; **Bloodied** 64
AC 29; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 31
Speed 6 (8 when charging)
⊕ **Quarterstaff** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+24 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage.
Binding Immolation (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Implement, Radiant**
Area burst 2 within 10 squares; targets enemies; +20 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 7 fire and radiant damage, and the target is slowed. *Effect:* Any ally in the burst gains 10 temporary hit points.
Warrior's Blessing (immediate interrupt, when a bloodied ally within 10 squares of the mystic hits with a melee basic attack; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
The triggering ally regains 10 hit points and deals 10 extra fire and radiant damage with the triggering attack.
Warrior's Surge (standard, usable only while bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
The mystic makes a melee basic attack and regains 32 hit points.
Alignment Lawful good **Languages** Common, Goblin
Skills Diplomacy +16, Religion +17
Str 19 (+12) **Dex** 16 (+11) **Wis** 24 (+15)
Con 21 (+13) **Int** 19 (+12) **Cha** 16 (+11)
Equipment hide armor, quarterstaff

Ghaash'kala Mystic Tactics

A Ghaash'kala mystic uses *binding immolation* most rounds, hoping to set up an allied defender's *binding flame strike* to immobilize foes. It spreads its *binding immolation* attacks out to give temporary hit points to as many allies as possible. It typically uses *warrior's blessing* to enhance a defender's *warrior's surge* attack, and has little chance to use *warrior's surge*, since it avoids melee combat.

Encounter Groups

Ghaash'kala warriors travel in small bands throughout the Labyrinth. Not every group includes a mystic alongside the defenders, and it's rare to find more than one mystic in a band. Other warriors in a band might include Carrion Tribe converts or other humanoids of equivalent level. Rarely, the Ghaash'kala might fight with supernatural aid, such as an angelic manifestation of the Binding Flame.

Level 15 Encounter (XP 6,000)
- ✦ 1 angel of battle (level 15 skirmisher; *Monster Manual*, page 14)
- ✦ 4 Ghaash'kala defenders (level 15 soldier)

Level 15 Encounter (XP 6,200)
- ✦ 1 Ghaash'kala mystic (level 17 artillery)
- ✦ 3 Ghaash'kala defenders (level 15 soldier)
- ✦ 1 Carrion tribe plaguebearer (level 14 brute; *Eberron Campaign Guide*, page 121)

About the Author
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Demonomicon of Iggwilv: Codricuhn, the Blood Storm

By Robert J. Schwalb

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Through air, I hurl thee . . .

With water, I drown thee . . .

By fire, I burn thee . . .

In earth, I bury thee . . .

Evil has many forms and wears many masks. It can be beautiful and alluring, its wonder eclipsing all as it captures the imagination and excites the mind. It can be hideous—so profoundly wrong that the merest glimpse is akin to a hammer to the mind's window, shattering reason into a thousand shards. Evil manifests across the world, in festering pools, tainted and twisted with proximity to the Shadowfell, vomited forth from rents to the Far Realm, hatched in distant dominions floating in the Astral Sea, or given birth in the depthless Abyss. Though evil's motives might vary, the ends it achieves are often the same: ruin, grief, injustice, and suffering. Whether demon or devil, aberrant horror, or cruel fey, evil swells in good's absence and when noble souls fail to blot the spreading stain and allow its progress to darken the world.

For many, evil is a philosophy made manifest by those who reject the notions of morality, order, or some other ideal to which the enlightened might cleave. As long as evil remains an idea expressed through mortal or immortal deeds, it can be stopped and, ultimately, defeated. Yet what if evil is something more—something physical that occupies a place in reality and is given mass, form, and purpose of its own?

Ancient legends tell of such an object: a shard of evil's essence drawn forth from reality's dimmest corner to pollute creation with such indescribable foulness that it forever alters the world's course. The power offered by this darkened sliver was fleeting, as well as too unpredictable and too awful for even a god to handle. Thus it was discarded into the Abyss, which accepts anything tossed into its depths. There it laid, the world's hatred, malice, and intolerance bound up in one speck, forgotten, but infinite in its influence. Its existence caused evil to awaken. Some of these evil beings roused at the behest of a divine finder, others came to consciousness of their own volition. The worst, though, were those transformed against their will and remade into thralls bowing to darkness's whims. These unthinking, rapacious beasts grew intent on bringing about the world's destruction even while the memories of what they once were caused them to fall into a tormented rage. Thus is the tale of Codricuhn, who is also known as the Blood Storm, the fallen Prince of the Eight Seas, the despised, and the bringer of dooms.

Description

Codricuhn's magnificence is no more: Gone is the coral crown, the sea spray of his breath, and the swirling currents cloaking his watery flesh. What the former primordial was has been replaced by chains and an unsightly blend of flesh and the remains of his elemental glory. Bits of a coral and bone skeleton are exposed or erupt awkwardly in painful, hornlike protrusions from his body. Where his body is whole, his flesh is a blend of angry red demon skin, masses of rock, and pools of bubbling magma.

A single glance at this demon prince's tortured form might suggest an unthinking beast or a tortured brute bent on attaining some impossible goal. Scrutiny reveals a dim sentience in the one baleful red eye, which is a gaping wound containing a jaundiced orb replete with crimson iris around an impenetrable pupil. As the eye rolls about, drifting in the socket, he aims his awful gaze, weeping bloody tears as if imploring witnesses to somehow stop him from attaining his unspeakable objective.

Wrapped around his tumescent bulk are old chains, forged from iron, bronze, and adamantine, and terrible weights hang from their lengths—some wedges or blocks, some like anchors, and others wrought to resemble animals, monstrous heads, and more. Gods, mortals, devils, and demon princes added their chains, all in a futile hope of slowing the horror's ascent as his fleshy appendages reach ever upward to find purchase in a fissure or ledge and pull his mass higher toward his goal: the Abyss's edge. The chains that bind him have created a mass of sores that ooze dark demon blood, send forth streams of befouled water, or blast out a rancid, crimson vapor.

Codricuhn's form hemorrhages crimson mist from dark suppurating pits dimpling his body. Lightning dances in clouds swirling about him, crackling and thundering with the urgency of a summer storm. Codricuhn draws chunks of tortured earth to him, substance discarded at the world's dawn by his primordial makers. These spheres of matter orbit the shuddering beast like the hands of a clock, counting the minutes and hours until the dire moment when the Blood Storm reaches its destination and heralds the world's end.

Each rock houses those fiends who swear service to the reluctant demon prince, and from these rocks they rule their tiny kingdoms, waging war against each other from time to time or drifting close to their horrific master to sample the ichors spilling from his flesh.

Codricuhn Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Arcana check.

DC 25: *The demon princes' apotheoses originated eons ago, when a dark god transformed primordial servants into the demonic masters who fight and battle in the Abyss, endlessly warring for dominance and vengeance. The likes of Yeenoghu, Demogorgon, Orcus, and others owe their reawakening to this profoundly dark act, but not all of the Abyss's denizens were so born, and many attained their statuses in the centuries that followed.*

Codricuhn is such a demon prince, forged in the aftermath of the Chained God's aborted war. The elemental lord of the sea's fury, he was among those seduced by the dark god following the demon princes' creation, for the mad deity realized his creations were too reckless and too self-serving to be of use. Thus he left them to languish in the Abyss while he convinced the other untainted primordials to join his cause.

As the surviving fragments of the Teleon scrolls recount, the dark god lost his war against the gods and was shackled in a faraway prison where he endures still. Those primordials who sided with him were slain or routed and then flung back into the Elemental Chaos. A few felt the Abyss's pull as they fell, and their descent's course shifted so that they could be sucked into the churning destruction. Of those, the demon princes captured, murdered, or subverted many, but at least one fell into the pit's deepest recesses and into the shadow cast by the seed of evil the Chained God first recovered in the black void.

The primordial who fell into the seed's shadow was none other than Codricuhn. Like his reborn kin—the masters of the Abyss—he experienced a terrible transformation. However, without a divine hand to guide his rebirth, the seed did as it wished and transformed the beautiful and terrible primordial into a tortured thing.

DC 30: *The seed's blessings were manifold. Codricuhn retained his influence over wind and rain, the tides, and the howling surf, but rather than embodying these forces, his watery form gained texture, confined by a thickening epidermis, to become a great bloated bag filled with blood and filth, yet with all of water's fluidity.*

Codricuhn **Level 27 Solo Controller**
Gargantuan elemental magical beast (demon) XP 55,000

Initiative +21 **Senses** Perception +25; tremorsense 20, truesight 10

Writhing Chains aura 5; Codricuhn deals 10 damage to any enemy that ends its turn within the aura and slides that enemy 3 squares.

Primordial Groan (Fear) aura 5; any enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes a -5 penalty to damage rolls and grants combat advantage until the start of its next turn.

HP 1,024; **Bloodied** 512

AC 41; **Fortitude** 41, **Reflex** 39, **Will** 37

Immune gaze; **Resist** 30 thunder, 10 variable (3/encounter)

Saving Throws +5

Speed 5, climb 5 (spider climb)

Action Points 2

⊕ **Ensnaring Chain** (standard; at-will)
Reach 4; +32 vs. AC; 1d8 + 9 damage, and the target is grabbed.

⊕ **Whipping Chains** (standard; at-will)
Codricuhn makes two ensnaring chain attacks.

⸸ **Rending Release** (minor; at-will)
Reach 4; targets all creatures grabbed by Codricuhn; +31 vs. Fortitude; 4d6 + 9 damage, and Codricuhn slides the target 5 squares and is no longer grabbing the target.

↺ **Codricuhn's Balance** (immediate reaction, when a creature within Codricuhn's line of sight is the target of a healing power; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Close burst 2; targets enemies; +31 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 8 lightning damage, and Codricuhn slides the target 3 squares.

↺ **Invoke the Blood Storm** (standard; usable only while bloodied; encounter)
Close burst 10; targets enemies; +31 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 8 damage, and ongoing 20 damage (save ends). *Aftereffect:* The target is stunned (save ends).

↺ **Tide of Chains** (standard; encounter)
Close blast 3; +31 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 9 damage, and the target falls prone and is grabbed.

✲ **Thunderous Torment** (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Thunder**
Area burst 1 within 10; +31 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 9 thunder damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). This attack does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Loose the Chains (when first bloodied)
Codricuhn gains an action point.

Mutable Shape
Codricuhn can squeeze through spaces as though he were a Large creature.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common, Primordial

Skills Athletics +27, Endurance +29, Intimidate +27

Str 28 (+22)	**Dex** 26 (+21)	**Wis** 24 (+20)
Con 32 (+24)	**Int** 10 (+13)	**Cha** 29 (+22)

DC 35: *Codricuhn's transformation was imperfect. Where the seed altered his peers in body and mind, Codricuhn endured only a physical transformation. His mind, though held in madness's grasp, recalls the past with perfect clarity, remembering the time when he mastered the seas and winds, when he fathered the storms and quelled the seas. His existence's conflict breeds an inner war between his will and the seed's power. Intellectually, Codricuhn wants only to return to what he was. The seed impels his body to seek Creation's destruction, and thus Codricuhn climbs, helpless to resist and groaning from the agony of his form and function. With each mile he ascends, so too does his madness deepen.*

DC 40: *Codricuhn's dire purpose has not gone unnoticed by the other demon princes, gods, and heroes. Although the fallen primordial does not wish the world's annihilation, his body and the darkness's will demand he seeks this end. Thus Codricuhn ascends from the Abyss's bowels to inch ever closer to the exit. Various agencies have each tried to slow the Blood Storm, binding him in chains, adding weights, or worrying him with attacks, and while each has succeeded in slowing the demon prince, none survived the efforts and all that remains of their sacrifice is their meeting's wreckage littering the demon prince's bulk.*

Codricuhn's Tactics

Codricuhn is erratic in battle, lashing out at any creature that draws too close, all the while silently imploring his victims to bring his miserable existence to an end. The demon begins the combat using *thunderous torment* to daze or stun his opponents, and then spends an action point to use *tide of chains*. Thereafter, he uses *whipping chains* to grab his enemies and *rending release* to punish and discard all enemies he has grabbed.

Codricuhn spends his action points early, dealing as much damage as he can. When he becomes bloodied, he uses *invoke the blood storm* and trains his attacks on enemies that avoided becoming stunned.

Goals and Objectives

Destruction defines the demon prince's purpose—Creation's utter and complete annihilation and a slow and agonizing death for those who live in it. With its end, the Feywild and Shadowfell will discorporate and dissolve into their fundamental substances. The Astral Dominions will recede into the silvery void and carry their gods with them into the ether, dead or forgotten. In their absence, a new world will take shape—a world imagined by evil and to serve the purpose of expanding the Abyss's fundamental darkness to all realities. This evil's will is what drives Codricuhn up through the Abyss's many layers, its appearance sparking terrible battles and appalling violence.

Yet wasting all of Creation is a mission imposed on the demon prince, not one he chooses of his own free will. Once, the primordial believed his desires were in accord with those of the Chained God, and he was convinced that divine forces had subverted the world the primordials had created. Codricuhn wanted to reclaim the mortal sphere. While his peers wanted to tear it all down and build it anew, and others saw themselves as the world's rightful rulers, wanting to exert their dominance once more, Codricuhn's interests were far more complex: He had no animosity for the mortal races, but he saw them as his subjects. They were the product of his labors, given self-awareness and free will by the god to be sure, but still they owed the primordials their due for the gift of flesh. Codricuhn would reclaim these mortals, purge the divine stain that corrupted their perfect forms, and demand veneration and service from them.

The Chained God made many promises to the primordials, each tailored for the specific architect he seduced, and Codricuhn he plied with assurances that the end he sought would be his. Naïveté or perhaps covetousness blinded Codricuhn from seeing the lies and thus marked the beginning of the primordial's fall.

Codricuhn has since had centuries to reflect on the singular error that led to his doom, and he blames the Chained God, his fellow primordials, and the demon princes for his suffering. Powerless to get vengeance, he craves oblivion because he believes it is the key to escaping the prison of his warped form. He has given up hope for restoration and knows anything less than his complete destruction will only further his torment.

Too bad, then, that he cannot just surrender to his enemies' spells and swords; the seed's corruption disallows any suicidal attempts and perverts Codricuhn's instinctual will to live so it assumes control whenever enemies attack.

Codricuhn pulls his bulk upward to escape the Abyss and the only time he pauses is when enemies converge. Sages believe if the demon prince escapes, he will set in motion the last days with the unleashing of corruption's seed. Thus many have given their lives to slow the demon prince's progress, their blood mingling with chains weighted to stave off the inevitable.

Aspect of Codricuhn

The Prince of the Eight Seas is only dimly aware of mortal service to him, and then he takes no interest in it, knowing that mortals do not venerate him but rather the corruption that drives him. Still, dark rituals can extract a portion of Codricuhn's dark heart to appear in the mortal world.

Description

The aspect of Codricuhn is not a spiritual reflection or even a manifestation of the fiend lord's dark will, but in truth, it is a clotted mass wrapped in chains pulled from Codricuhn's form, ripped free and sucked into another world by reckless magic wielded by insane cultists and nihilists. The bleeding heap contains a fragment of Codricuhn's consciousness, but even this fades as the pestilential evil asserts its control, guiding the monstrosity to slaughter the fools that called it into being.

Aspect of Codricuhn	**Level 22 Elite Brute**
Huge elemental magical beast (blind, demon)	XP 8,300
Initiative +16	**Senses** Perception +16; blindsight 10, tremorsense 10
Chain Squall aura 2; the aspect of Codricuhn deals 10 damage to any enemy that ends its turn within the aura and slides that enemy 2 squares.	
HP 520; **Bloodied** 260	
AC 34; **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 32	
Immune gaze; **Resist** 10 variable (3/encounter)	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 6, climb 8 (spider climb)	
Action Points 1	
⊕ **Barbed Grab** (standard; at-will)	
Reach 3; +25 vs. AC; 2d6 + 8 damage, and the target is grabbed.	
⸸ **Rending Release** (minor; at-will)	
Reach 3; targets one creature the aspect is currently grabbing; +23 vs. Fortitude; 4d6 + 8 damage, and the aspect of Codricuhn slides the target 3 squares and is no longer grabbing the target.	
⸸ **Tide of Chains** (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃)	
Reach 3; the aspect makes a *barbed grab* attack against each creature in its reach.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** understands Abyssal
Skills Athletics +24, Endurance +26	
Str 27 (+19)	**Dex** 21 (+16) **Wis** 20 (+16)
Con 30 (+21)	**Int** 4 (+8) **Cha** 23 (+17)

Aspect of Codricuhn's Tactics

Violent and unpredictable, the aspect uses *tide of chains* when it first appears, wrapping its enemies in barbed bindings, and then it uses *rending release* to discard the weaker prey it has ensnared. While waiting for its power to recharge, Codricuhn makes *barbed grab* attacks and flings away grabbed opponents until no enemies remain.

Aspect of Codricuhn Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Arcana check.

DC 25: *Few Blood Storm cultists dare summon their master's aspect because, in almost every case, they are its first victims.*

The Voice of the Storm, Exarch of Codricuhn

The Blood Storm wants no servants but gains them anyway. Those who attend the hulking fiend find no rewards and no favor for their aid. If they want to benefit from their master's service, they must find their own ways of doing so.

The greatest of Codricuhn's attendants is the Voice of the Storm, once a cherished archon, but transformed when it fell along with its master. Since the Voice acts as the demon prince's herald, envoy, steward, and commander of the Blood Storm's demons, it has unusual authority in his service.

Description

The Voice is a horror. Possessed of an oversized mortal man's physique, it is chiseled and almost appealing. From afar, the Voice seems angelic, with two feathery wings emerging from its back, but any physical beauty it might possess is immediately overshadowed by its awful visage. A great sucking maw occupies much of its head—a lamprey's mouth filled with inwardly curved teeth clotted with rotten meat and a bevy of toxins.

The Voice of the Storm **Level 25 Elite Controller**
Large elemental humanoid (blind, demon) XP 14,000
Initiative +20 **Senses** Perception +18; blindsight 20, tremorsense 20
HP 458; **Bloodied** 229
AC 39; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 39
Immune gaze; **Resist** 10 variable (3/encounter)
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, fly 8 (hover)
Action Points 1

⊕ **Appalling Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Reach 2; +30 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).

Wing Slap (minor; at-will)
Reach 2; +30 vs. AC; 2d8 + 4 damage, and the Voice slides the target 2 squares.

Howl of Madness (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 10; targets enemies; deafened creatures are immune; +29 vs. Will; the target is dazed and must use its standard action on its turns to make a basic attack against an ally adjacent to it or a charge attack against the nearest legal ally (save ends both).

Speak the Thunder (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Thunder**
Close blast 5; +29 vs. Fortitude; 3d8 + 9 thunder damage, and the target is dazed and deafened (save ends both).

Wind Gust (immediate interrupt, when an enemy moves to flank the Voice; at-will)
Close burst 2; +29 vs. Fortitude; the Voice pushes the target 3 squares and knocks the target prone.

Invoke the Master's Lightning (standard; encounter) ✦ **Lightning, Zone**
Area burst 2 within 10; +29 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 9 damage plus 1d10 lightning damage. The burst creates a zone of crackling barbed chains until the end of the encounter. The zone is difficult terrain, and any creature that starts its turn within the zone takes 10 lightning damage.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common Primordial
Skills Arcana +23, Bluff +26, History +23, Intimidate +26
Str 16 (+15) **Dex** 26 (+20) **Wis** 23 (+18)
Con 21 (+17) **Int** 22 (+18) **Cha** 29 (+21)

The Voice of the Storm Tactics

The Voice represents its master and so it is the Blood Storm's face. Should the Voice be drawn into battle, it proves a ferocious enemy, using *speak the thunder* to confound foes and then following up with an *appalling bite* attack. Its *wing slap* keeps enemies from closing in on it. Against enemies at range, the Voice uses *invoke the master's lightning* to contain them, while pressing the attack against nearby opponents. Once the Voice becomes bloodied, it uses *howl of madness* and quits the battlefield, leaving its enemies for its allies to fight.

The Voice of the Storm Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Arcana check.

DC 25: *The Blood Storm's greatest servant is the Voice, a corrupted archon reborn in evil. Ruling the demons attending the climbing beast, the Voice keeps its position by pitting rivals against one another.*

DC 30: *The Voice is not to be trusted, for it honors no bargain and knows only treachery. It offers sweet promises but it betrays the first chance it gets.*

DC 35: *Although sworn to protect and aid the Blood Storm, if it was a true servant, the Voice would destroy its prince. In truth, the Voice serves the festering darkness in the Abyss's depths and works tirelessly to ensure its "master" does as evil's seed bids.*

Coagulus

Unlike other demon princes, Codricuhn doesn't have a fixed realm. Instead, his demesne Coagulus follows him wherever he goes. It is a vile storm fed by his madness, and it lashes the lands all around with jagged steel barbs, toxic rain, and relentless winds.

Coagulus Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful skill check.

Arcana DC 25: *Coagulus is the name some demonologists gave to the chaotic storm raging around Codricuhn. The storm is not a thing separate from the demon prince; it is as much part of it as is its flesh and bloody red eye. The storm has always raged around the demonic master, a vestige from his existence as a primordial.*

Arcana DC 30: *Codricuhn's foulness allows the storm to exist, but aside from atmospheric manifestation of the demon prince's ill-will, it also serves to shelter the Beast from its enemies. Slashing lightning, deafening thunder, and relentless rains make travel through the miles-wide storm utter misery.*

Also, the boiling clouds conceal the six Spheres orbiting the demon prince. These are Codricuhn's realm, because each crumbling mote honors the suffering fiend and houses its greatest servants. On these spheres terrible atrocities take place in Codricuhn's name, and the tormented beast's inability and unwillingness to halt their occurrences, as well as disinterest in the fates of those who suffer, secure the monstrosity's place among the Abyss's worst demons.

Arcana DC 35: *Nominally, all the Spheres are Codricuhn's, but the demon prince cares nothing for them or about what transpires in their darkened corridors. Powerful demon lords command the spheres, ruling their domains as they will and paying token honors to their lord. A few fiends have attempted to supplant Codricuhn, but the Voice keeps ambitious demons from growing their power and removes them if they reach too far.*

History DC 20: *History recounts many queer storms in the mortal world—unusual meteorological events causing widespread destruction either from natural disasters including winds and rains, but also supernatural catastrophes. Some storms bring plagues, cause the dead to stir from their graves, or spew frogs, rats, cockroaches, and pus when the clouds burst. Few give credence to these tales, chalking them up to myth and superstition, but those familiar with demonic lore pay special attention to these reports in fear they presage some greater disaster.*

History DC 25: *The last queer storm to ravage the world swept across the Whispering Sea a century ago. A bank of green clouds formed over a sudden maelstrom, spawned by toxic clouds escaping the mile-wide whirlpool. The storm raced across the sea and smashed into the coastline, washing away an entire town in sheets of crimson rain. No one remembers the town or which shore bore the storm's fury, but reports describe strange things washing up from the sea's depths from time to time, including odd limbs twitching as if still alive.*

Religion DC 15: *Apocryphal texts warn of a coming apocalypse—an emerging doom to herald the last days. Each treatise on the cataclysm includes mention of specific omens portending the doom, and although few lists have anything in common, one recurring theme touched on by nearly all is the Emergent Storm—a vile tempest of leprous green clouds, raining blood, and the six echoing thunders.*

Religion DC 20: *Demonologists agree the Emergent Storm of these ancient writings is in fact a description of Codricuhn's demesne, Coagulus, the Blood Storm. Even the demon princes fear what will occur when the Beast finally crawls forth from the pit; some whisper Codricuhn will swell and spread its poisonous atmosphere across the Elemental Chaos and into the mortal world beyond.*

Spheres

Six misshapen chunks of rock orbit the suffering demon prince. Some are rough rock, scoured clean by the constant rains, and to all outward appearances they are barren. Beneath their austere surfaces worm winding tunnels and passages where all demons and deviants thrive. Others are bizarre structures, amalgamating architectural styles from across worlds and from many different times. A tangle of towers, walls, and staircases, they look like spiked orbs spinning through the green-black clouds from a distance. All are terrible places and each reflects the character and nature of its master.

Addaecacus: The smallest sphere in orbit, Addaecacus is a relatively new satellite and was pulled into Codricuhn's influence a mere century ago. A jagged knot of rusting iron, barbs, hooks, and serrated blades emerges from its oozing surface. Inside, odd-shaped rooms assembled in a higgledy-piggledy fashion contain maimed demons, fiends caught in cruel traps, and wicked devices designed to chew through flesh and bone. Walking through its insane corridors, one hears incessant laughter, queer giggling, and wet splattering noises punctuated with sharp screams. A bloated evistro demon named Gullet rules Addaecacus, and he and a pack of simpering sycophantic elves entrapped in this place make rounds through its many chambers to feast on still-living viscera plucked from the teeth of Addaecacus's numerous traps.

Caedices: Leering gargoyle faces adorn the Caedices's rocky façade, each vomiting blood to join the drenching rains pouring from swollen clouds swirling around the sphere. Caedices is a stone ball bristling with towers jutting out in odd angles. One can access the inner chambers through any one of thirteen yawning gates, each leading to sodden corridors and festering rooms where cockroaches feast on the leavings of those who have fallen. A mezzodemon stronghold, Caedices's has mercenary demons that are not so much servants as they are neighbors. Commanding the legions is Anastraxus, a great warrior and brilliant general whose tactics and maneuvers have allowed his forces to defeat armies many times the size of his own.

Condordus: A perfect glass sphere with a mirror finish, Condordus is home to the Voice of the Sphere and his demonic army. Nondemons can pass through the sphere's surface by betraying one of their own, and spilling an ally's blood onto its surface causes an iris to open on its surface. Within it is a breathtaking vista—a realm of orange clouds roiling against a green sky. Somewhere in its heart is a crystalline palace where the Voice wastes the hours listening to a symphony of screams, each forced through the parched throats of captive mortals.

Doelen: The glabrezu despot, Kaelinruth, rules this craggy sphere. Doelen appears to be a dripping ball of mud, with rivers of slime spilling from the orb as it progresses around the demon prince. Waterspouts send superheated water and the occasional unlucky demon plummeting miles before splattering on some unforgiving surface below. Kaelinruth's palace rises from the muck, a hideous fortress assembled from the carapaces harvested from monstrous crabs that once scuttled across the sphere's gooey surface.

Luesithica: Another rocky satellite, Luesithica is a rough chunk of black stone, similar in shape to a great rotten tooth. On its somewhat flat top gathers a lake of poisonous water collected from the incessant rains, overflowing into channels that allow the runoff to spill down its sides into the void below. Old legends claim Luesithica gathers Codricuhn's tears for the demons to sample, each delighting in the grief contained within every drop. A beautiful marilith named the Lady of Sorrows searches for perfect mortal love, yet every mortal she takes she drowns in the ubiquitous pools glittering throughout her realm.

Proelidimar: The shattered half-sphere of Proelidimar has known no respite from conflict since it was first ripped from Yeenoghu's Realm ages ago. Half of Proelidimar is smooth obsidian, but the rest is rugged with razor-sharp mounds and deep fissures. Here, a half-dozen hezrou demons squabble for control, each leading a sea of dretch. They send wave after futile wave against the other in the hope of wresting control over the beleaguered realm.

Plots and Dark Deeds

The Voice maintains control as best it can lest the various powers tear each other apart. The Voice plies its rivals with half-truths and false promises, seeding their imaginations with half-realized plots against other masters, all to keep them fighting against one another. The Voice lends aid to the weaker elements, and then withdraws its favor to keep a constant balance between them. Should the Voice fall in defeat, undoubtedly one would rise to claim its place, but the reign undoubtedly would be brief and end in spectacular violence.

The Imminent Catastrophe

Codricuhn is a poor master. The misguided mortals seeking him out find no answer to their prayers and no power in exchange for their service. Any mortal who binds his or fate to this uncaring master can expect hardship, suffering, and bitter defeat. Yet, no shortage of fools wait to embrace the whisper of power and hopes faintly for aid from something beyond their ken, and the Imminent Catastrophe binds them together in purpose.

Imminent Catastrophe Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Religion check.

DC 10: Doomsday cults crop up in just about every civilized land in the world. From servants of vengeful gods who visit divine justice on those who wronged their chosen followers, to sinister cults fomenting madness and evil in cellars and old ruins far from prying eyes. Whether believing they serve good or ill, the end they all seek is the ruin of all things so that they can allow something better to take its place.

DC 15: *Many doomsday cults are merely misguided souls who have suffered long from ostracism, bigotry, or abuse, and the hope of vengeance gives them purpose. Far too many, though, serve dark powers, cruel and merciless gods, forgotten entities, or vicious demons hungering for flesh and souls. The Imminent Catastrophe is just one of the many groups to profess a coming doom that will scour the world clean. They claim they serve the Lord of Vengeance, a storm god whose name must not be spoken lest you invite his wrath. They use threats, insults, and even force to gain converts, and they are relentless in their pursuit to rescue as many souls from destruction as they can.*

DC 25: *Only the highest-ranking cultists are aware of who and what it is that they serve, but their long indoctrination in their faith's tenets inures them against the hideous truth of their "god's" identity. They know Codricuhn will one day emerge, and when he does, the world will die. They can only hope that the Beast will pity them, killing them first or saving them for the world that shall come after.*

Organization

The members of the Imminent Catastrophe are right and wrong in their beliefs. They are correct that unless stopped, their master will come to the world bringing ruin and death, but they are wrong in thinking they will somehow be spared; their deaths will be as agonizing as the rest.

Leader: The cult has no central authority, but several highly-placed members are tasked to steer their followers. The highest-ranking members are called the Listeners and they, and they alone, are privy to the malicious whispers that occasionally tumble out of the void. Most believe these commandments come from Codricuhn, but in actuality, it is the Voice. It uses the cult to further its own agenda—namely increasing its power and extending evil's reach throughout the mortal world.

Headquarters: The Imminent Catastrophe has holdings in most large cities, and they gather in small temples where they express their devotion in highly ritualized ceremonies involving extensive prayers, consumption of hallucinogenic substances, and terrifying sermons describing a dark and merciless future. Each temple is an independent operation left to its own devices. From time to time, a Listener might visit the temple to offer further instructions, but such visits are rare.

Hierarchy: Beneath the Listeners, the cult is arranged by a convoluted system of titles and powers, built, usually, on seniority. Most cultists make up their own titles, borrowing terminology from legitimate temples, and so one will see priests, high priests, deacons, fathers, mothers, cousins, elders, bishops, and a host of other positions. In effect, a title indicates some responsibility. Everyone below the title is a brother or sister, and their duty is to spread the warnings and recruit new followers.

Members: Most people who find the Imminent Catastrophe have led difficult lives and experienced horrors resulting from crime, addiction, abuse, war, or disease. Bereft of hope, these souls embrace the cult for its promise of salvation and fill their broken hearts with the falsities peddled by its leaders. For most, fear keeps them in line—fear of returning to the deprivation they have known, of being ostracized, of isolation, and of death.

Diaconate of Bindings' Tactics

The diaconate swings a spiked censer filled with toxic herbs and unguents so when ignited, the censer smokes and poisons those who breathe in their foul vapors. The diaconate raves about the world's demise as it swings the censer like a weapon. Only when it is bloodied does it pull down its mask to reveal the madness fueling its fervor.

Diaconate of Bindings **Level 8 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid (blind), human XP 350

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +8; blindsight 10
Maddening Fumes (Fear) aura 2; the diaconate slides any enemy that starts its turn within the aura 1 square.
HP 86; **Bloodied** 43
AC 22; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 22
Speed 5

⊕ **Spiked Censer** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**
Reach 2; +13 vs. AC; 2d4 + 2 damage, and the target and each creature adjacent to the target take 5 poison damage and are slowed (save ends).

↛ **Master's Shackles** (standard; at-will)
Ranged 10; +12 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 2 damage, and if the target shifts or willingly moves more than 3 squares before the start of the diaconate's next turn, it takes 5 damage.

✧ **Horrific Visage** (minor; must be bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Fear, Gaze**
The diaconate momentarily removes its mask; close burst 5; targets enemies; +10 vs. Will; the target moves its speed away from the diaconate by the safest route, and grants combat advantage (save ends). *Miss:* The target grants combat advantage (save ends).

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Skills Arcana +9, Intimidate +14, Religion +9
Str 16 (+7) **Dex** 9 (+3) **Wis** 8 (+3)
Con 14 (+6) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 20 (+9)
Equipment eyeless mask, chainmail, spiked censer

Iron Martyr Tactics

Iron martyrs are reckless and believe self-sacrifice will reward them in death. They are merciless, asking and granting no quarter. They pound their enemies with spiked gauntlets while singing psalms to their unresponsive master.

Iron Martyr **Level 4 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 175

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +2
HP 66; **Bloodied** 33
AC 16; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14
Speed 6

⊕ **Spiked Gauntlet** (standard; at-will)
+7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 6 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the iron martyr's next turn.

Bloodsoaked Fury (while bloodied)
The iron martyr gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls, damage rolls, and Will.

✧ **Hideous Strike** (standard; encounter)
+7 vs. AC; 3d6 + 4 damage, and the target is stunned until the end of the iron martyr's next turn.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Str 19 (+6) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 11 (+2)
Con 16 (+5) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 10 (+2)
Equipment iron helmet, leather armor, spiked gauntlets

Encounter Groups

Most encounters with the Imminent Catastrophe feature misguided common folk seduced by the cult and drawn into its fold. If the cult comes under attack, it might crusade. In this case, a diaconate or some other leader gathers a small force of zealots to punish the nonbelievers. Rarely, the cult supplements their numbers with demons, but only in those cases where the cult is so old and entrenched that the appearance of such creatures would not jeopardize their mission.

Level 7 Encounter (XP 1,550)
- ✦ Diaconate of Bindings (level 8 controller)
- ✦ 2 evistros (level 6 brute; *Monster Manual*, page 54)
- ✦ 4 iron martyrs (level 4 brute)

Demon

Many demons are creatures of flesh and blood, whose unceasing hatred and violence drives them to horrific acts of evil. In places where the Elemental Chaos gives way to the Abyss, however, the connections between demons and other elemental creatures become clearer. The Abyss's innate maliciousness washes against the elemental shores and infuses it with cruelty and evil, spawning new demons from the malleable substance of creation. One such creature is the terraguhl.

Terraguhl

Among the most horrific creatures found in Codricuhn's employ, the terraguhls are sentient mounds of grave dirt, replete with twitching corpses trapped in their bodies and compelled by madness and wickedness to bury their enemies alive.

Terraguhl	**Level 8 Soldier**
Large elemental magical beast (demon, earth, undead)	XP 350
Initiative +9	**Senses** Perception +4; darkvision, tremorsense 10
Grasping Corpses aura 1; any enemy that starts its turn within the aura is slowed until the start of its next turn.	
HP 93; **Bloodied** 46	
AC 24; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 18	
Resist 10 necrotic, 5 variable (1/encounter)	
Speed 5, burrow 5; see also *plunge*	
⊕ **Claws** (standard; at-will)	
+15 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 2 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).	
⇜ **Entomb** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Reliable**	
Close burst 3; targets one slowed or immobilized creature; +11 vs. Fortitude; the target is buried under the surface of the ground (save ends). While buried, the target is restrained and blind, and only creatures with burrowing can have line of effect to the target. Each time the target fails a save against this effect, it takes 5 damage and the terraguhl regains 5 hit points. *Aftereffect:* The target is half-buried (save ends). While half-buried, the target is immobilized and prone.	
Combat Advantage	
A terraguhl's melee attacks deal 1d6 extra damage to any target granting combat advantage to it.	
Plunge (move; at-will)	
The terraguhl shifts 1 square and burrows 2 squares.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Abyssal
Str 16 (+7)	**Dex** 16 (+7) **Wis** 11 (+4)
Con 21 (+9)	**Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 8 (+3)

Terraguhl Tactics

The terraguhl homes in on one foe at a time, burrowing through the ground to emerge and attack with its claws. The terraguhl waits for the right moment to *entomb* and then maul an enemy.

Terraguhl Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Arcana check.

DC 15: *Formed from the Abyssal dirt of Thanatos when Codricuhn passed through Orcus's demesne ages ago, these fiends now skulk about the many spheres orbiting around their demonic master.*

Encounter Groups

Terraguhls are found in Codricuhn's wake or inhabiting the rockier spheres. They often work with other demons, not out of any loyalty, but by shared desire to wreak havoc and death.

Level 8 Encounter (XP 1,700)

- ✦ 4 evistros (level 6 brute; *Monster Manual* page 54)
- ✦ 2 terraguhls (level 8 soldier)

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb contributed design to such books as the *Forgotten Realms® Player's Guide, Draconomicon I: Chromatic Dragons, Manual of the Planes, P2: Demon Queen's Enclave, Martial Power, Player's Handbook 2, Eberron® Campaign Guide, Eberron Player's Guide, Divine Power, Adventurer's Vault 2, Draconomicon 2: Metallic Dragons, Primal Power,* as well as numerous articles for D&D Insider. Robert lives in Tennessee.

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

EXPLORE AIRSPUR

Villains and Vagabonds

by Matt James
illustration by Wayne England
cartography by Jared Blando

The beauty and majesty of Airspur is rivaled by none with its colorful hues and gentle flowing water beneath breathtaking earth motes. It is that which stirs underneath the calm facade of this genasi city that brings the unseen, let alone understood, and the uncertainty of the night. As with each city in Faerün, there is always another side; one that many choose to ignore or are simply too afraid to acknowledge.

ALYSHEX, WEAPONS DEALER

Innocuously found within the city of Airspur is an eager yet cautious purveyor of weaponry; a querulous half-orc female by the name of Alyshex. This local merchant is as beautiful as she is unscrupulous and is always looking out for herself. Alyshex is a direct descendant of Khrulus, the previous leader of Airspur before the Spellplague brought the hordes of genasi refugees to the region.

Tactics

Alyshex is intelligent and not beneath doing anything to get her way. Though she is somewhat capable of defending herself, she often uses local thugs to do the heavy lifting in combat.

Encounter Group

Alyshex rarely travels anywhere without an entourage of goons at her side.

Level 3 Encounter (XP 300)

✦ Alyshex (level 3 artillery)
✦ 4 human gang members (level 1 minion, *Forgotten Realms® Campaign Guide*, page 31)
✦ 2 human bandits (level 2 skirmisher, *Monster Manual®*, page 162)

Hook: Introducing Alyshex

Alyshex often seeks out fledgling adventurers who appear easy to influence.

Alyshex is an unknown political threat to the government of Airspur. While she has not explicitly gone out of her way to cause trouble, she is always looking for a way to usurp power.

The local magistrate offers to pay the characters to investigate criminal activity within Airspur relating to events surrounding Alyshex.

Alyshex	**Level 3 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, half-orc	XP 150
Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +3	
HP 35; **Bloodied** 17	
AC 15; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15	
Speed 6	
⊕ **Skewer** (standard; at-will)✦ **Weapon**	
+10 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.	
⊗ **Ice Ray** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold**	
Ranged 20; +8 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 3 cold damage and the target is slowed (save ends).	
Storm of Energy (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning**	
Ranged 10; +8 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 3 lightning damage and the target is dazed (save ends).	
Shield (immediate interrupt; encounter)	
Alyshex gains +4 to AC and Reflex until the end of her next turn.	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Giant	
Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 11 (+1)	
Con 11 (+1) **Int** 14 (+3) **Cha** 11 (+1)	
Equipment short sword	

Regional Background: Airspur

Airspur is the most powerful mercantile hub in all of Akanül and the ruling city of the region. Though the population is primarily Genasi, most other races can be found within.

Benefit: +2 bonus to acrobatics and diplomacy.

Kevrick, Vistani Elder

This vagabond is an Elder amongst the Vistani, a nomadic people who travel in caravans across the known world and beyond. Kevrick is not inherently evil, but he is not good, either. Kevrick always takes advantage of any situation and will go to great lengths to ensure that he ends up with the better end of the deal.

Tactics

Kevrick prefers to strike with surprise if at all possible, gaining as much of an advantage as possible. He will usually single out one opponent while using his *evil eye of the Vistani* power to keep others away.

Encounter Group

Though Kevrick does travel alone from time to time, he usually has an entourage of friends and family following him around.

Level 15 Encounter (XP 6,400)

✦ Kevrick (level 15 elite skirmisher)
✦ 4 human snipers (level 12 lurker, *Dungeon* 158)
✦ 4 human soldier minions (level 15 minion, *Dungeon* 158)

Hook: Introducing Kevrick

Kevrick likes to play pranks on people. Though most of these pranks are harmless, he doesn't mind angering someone for his own enjoyment.

Kevrick is always keen on enterprises that will bring more wealth to his pockets. Anytime the characters stand to earn money, he could show up with a proposal.

The characters are ambushed within the city and robbed by Kevrick and his companions.

After being arrested for thievery, Kevrick has performed a daring escape. The characters are hired to track him down and bring him to justice.

The local magistrate is interested in having the characters investigate illicit activities that Kevrick has been alleged to be involved in.

Kevrick	**Level 15 Elite Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid	XP 2,400
Initiative +21	**Senses** Perception +10
HP 292; **Bloodied** 146	
AC 29; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 28	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 6	
Action Points 1	
Slashing Feint (standard; at-will) ✦ **Martial**	
+20 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage and Kevrick can shift 1 square (4d8 + 22 damage on critical hit).	
Double Attack (standard; at-will) ✦ **Melee**	
Kevrick makes two *slashing feint* attacks.	
Off-Hand Pierce (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Martial**	
+18 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 6 damage (2d10 + 16 damage on critical hit).	
Crossbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Ranged**	
Ranged 10; +20 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage.	
Evil Eye of the Vistani (minor; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Ranged**	
Ranged 10; +18 vs. Will; until the end of Kevrick's next turn, the target grants combat advantage and cannot willingly move closer to Kevrick.	
Deadly Aim (standard; encounter) ✦ **Ranged**	
Ranged 10; +18 vs. Reflex; 4d10 + 6 damage and the target is stunned (save ends).	
Deadly Repercussions (standard; encounter) ✦ **Implement, Psychic**	
Close burst 2; +18 vs. Will; 3d8 + 8 psychic damage. The target grants combat advantage and has ongoing 10 damage (save ends both). Until the target saves against this effect, once each turn when the target hits an ally roll 1d6; the target takes a penalty to saving throws equal to the result until the end of Kevrick's next turn.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common, Elven
Str 16 (+10)	**Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 20 (+12)
Con 18 (+11)	**Int** 15 (+9) **Cha** 12 (+8)
Equipment leather armor, scimitar, dagger, crossbow, pouch with 20 bolts	

Valshelar: Traitor of Airspur

Valshelar is a Genasi agent of the Netherese, recruited because he is native to the city. He is tasked with infiltrating the inner circles of the Airspur government. While his overall role is small, it is not uncommon for the Shadovar to deploy such agents for their own needs.

Tactics

Valshelar stalks his opposition from the shadows and uses terrain to his advantage. If actively hunting someone, he will use his *dart spray* ability to slow his opposition and keep them from getting away. If being hunted by the law (or others), he will use the same attack as a means to slow them while he gets away.

Encounter Group

Valshelar never travels alone; he always has thugs nearby.

Level 2 Encounter (XP 600)
✦ Valshelar (level 2 elite lurker)
✦ 4 human thugs (level 1 minion, *Dungeon 155*)
✦ 2 human ruffians (level 2 skirmisher, *Dungeon 155*)

Hook: Shadovar Infiltration

Valshelar is an easy NPC to introduce into your players' exploits in the city of Airspur. Whether he is involved in an elaborate political scheme or characters have the "simple" task of hunting him down, Valshelar provides nearly limitless possibilities to a young group of adventurers.

Valshelar	**Level 2 Elite Lurker**
Medium elemental humanoid (genasi, water)	XP 250
Initiative +8	**Senses** Perception +6; tremorsense
HP 58; **Bloodied** 29	
AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 6	
Action Points 1	
Piercing Thrust (standard; at-will) ✦ **Martial, Weapon**	
+7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage (1d6 +9 damage on critical hit).	
Double Attack (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Valshelar makes two *piercing thrust* attacks.	
Counter (immediate reaction; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**	
When hit with a melee attack; +7 vs. AC; 1d10 +3 damage (1d10 + 9 damage on critical hit) and the target is dazed (save ends).	
Dart Spray (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**	
Close blast 3; targets enemies; +5 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 3 damage and the target is slowed (save ends).	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Primordial
Str 8 (+0)	**Dex** 20 (+6) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 11 (+1)	**Int** 11 (+1) **Cha** 17 (+4)
Equipment hide armor, katar, satchel with 6 darts	

Long-Term Plot Device

Valshelar is a great NPC to introduce long-term campaign plotlines. Though he may seem too low-level to be involved with high-level shenanigans, he could be precisely what is needed to set things in motion in whatever direction you wish.

Hazards and Hideaways

Fortune comes only to those willing to risk life and limb. What thrills are to be sought in the majesty of Airspur? What is hidden behind Akanawater Falls that requires magical protection?

Akanawater Falls

One of the most beautiful sites (or sights) in all of Faerün is the breathtaking, raw power of the Akanawater Falls. Those who have been fortunate enough to explore this treasure have rarely been disappointed. The crystal-clear water pours down in a vortex of swirls that can leave one deafened by its moiling roar. What is mostly unknown is that which lies below; the entrance to an elaborate labyrinth that leads to the Sepulcher of the Goblin Baron.

Optional Encounter

The labyrinth leading to the sepulcher provides excellent opportunities for additional skill challenges and combat encounters. Any subterranean creature would fit well in this situation, according to party level.
Skill Challenge: "Akanawater Falls," page 103.

Sepulcher of the Goblin Baron

Hidden deep within the recesses below Akanawater Falls is an underwater entrance to a secret goblin hideout. Fresh air is abundant here, thanks to tiny natural vents leading to the surface, making this the perfect lair for these miscreants. Long ago, an enterprising goblin literally stumbled into this location and recognized its value. He recruited others to help in his devious plans to rob merchant ships in the area surrounding Airspur. These goblins are a major nuisance in the area, but they've never been caught—because no one can find their lair. The Firestorm Cabal has branded the leader as "the Goblin Baron" for his ability to plan and lead these raids.

Adventurers may find clues to the sepulcher's location in old documents or early accounts of the area, through rituals, by interrogating goblins, or by talking to the very seediest characters in town—the sorts that most people avoid like the plague.

When the characters arrive at the entrance of the cave, read:
The dank smell of rotting fish permeates the cave entrance. Though it is dark within, you can make out a slight flickering of light.
Tactical Encounter: "Sepulcher of the Goblin Baron", page 104.

Scale the Encounter

A current Dungeons & Dragons® *Insider* subscription affords players and dungeon masters alike the opportunity to access the new DM tools. Among them is the D&D Monster Builder, a tool that allows a DM to adjust the level and power of monsters. If your characters are above the recommended level for any of these encounters, use this tool to adjust accordingly. This saves you time while ensuring that characters are sufficiently challenged by the monsters.

A1: Akanawater Falls

Encounter Level 2 (625 XP)
Seething below and to the west of the city of Airspur is the turbulent water of Akanawater Falls. Rituals have been worked on the falls to increase their intensity, chiefly as a means to drive underwater turbines which power the city's large granaries. Creatures trying to dive beneath the falls can find themselves dragged into a maelstrom and unexpected machinery.

Secrets of Akanawater Falls

It is necessary for the characters to traverse the Akanawater Falls in order to reach the sepulcher of the goblin baron. Brute strength need not be the only means of overcoming this turbulent place; wits are also required if one is to survive.

Level: 2 (375 XP).

Complexity: 3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills: Athletics, Arcana, Insight, Nature.

Athletics (DC 15): Knowing that these situations can be grave, you use brute strength to swim through the raging water and strong currents. This skill can be used to gain any number of successes in this challenge.

Arcana (DC 15): The character senses the magical influences that Airspur deployed to increase the flow of water in this area and uses that information to find a path to safety. This skill can be used to gain a maximum of 2 successes in this challenge.

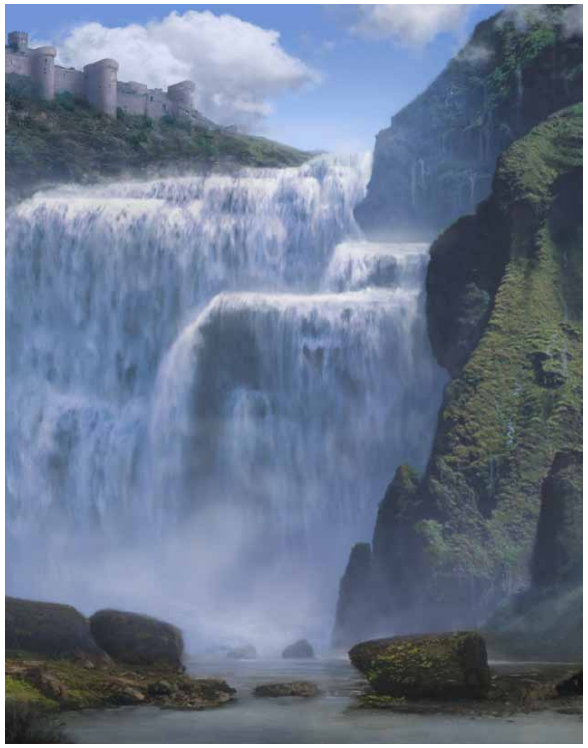
Insight (DC 10): The character identifies the mechanical portions of the turbines and is able to

avoid their sweeping blades. This skill can be used to gain a maximum of 1 success in this challenge.

Nature (DC 10): The character has had prior experience with waterfalls and understands how currents work beneath them. Using this knowledge lets the character follow the safest course through the treacherous eddies. This skill can be used to gain any number of successes in this challenge.

Success: The party successfully navigates to the entrance of the Sepulcher of the Goblin Baron.

Failure: The characters are tossed by the currents and waves beneath the waterfall and dashed back onto the shore. Each character who participated in the skill challenge loses two healing surges, then characters can try again if they desire.



A2: Sepulcher of the Goblin Baron

Encounter Level 2 (650 XP)

✦ Goblin underboss (U)
✦ 2 goblin blackblades (B)
✦ 4 goblin cutters (C)

Setup

This encounter takes place in a watery grotto tucked well behind the Akanawater Falls in the city of Airspur. The goblins use the grotto to store treasures that have been pilfered over the years. The natural structure and location of this cavern make it an ideal place for any vagabond to stow his loot.

When the characters first enter the sepulcher, read:

The strong stench of garbage and refuge permeates the humid air and fills your mouth with a bitter taste. A soft yellow glow emanates from some sort of natural fungi that to grows in the area.

About the Author

When not writing for Dungeons & Dragons®, Matt is chained to his desk working endlessly on developing his website, Loremaster (http://www.loremaster.org). You can also follow Matt's gaming insights at www.twitter.com/matt_james_fr.

Goblin Cutter (C) **Level 1 Minion**
Small natural humanoid (goblin) XP 25

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +1; low-light vision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion
AC 16; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 11
Speed 6

⨺ **Short Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+6 vs. AC; 4 damage (5 damage if the goblin cutter has combat advantage against the target).

Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)
The goblin shifts 1 square.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Goblin
Skills Stealth +10, Thievery +10
Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+1)
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 8 (-1) **Cha** 8 (-1)
Equipment leather armor, short sword

Goblin Blackblade (B) **Level 1 Lurker**
Small natural humanoid (goblin) XP 100

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +1; low-light vision
HP 25; **Bloodied** 12
AC 16; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 11
Speed 6

⨺ **Short Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+5 vs. AC; 1d6 + 2 damage.

Combat Advantage
The goblin blackblade deals an extra 1d6 damage against any target it has combat advantage against.

Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)
The goblin shifts 1 square.

Sneaky
When shifting, a goblin blackblade can move into a space occupied by an ally of its level or lower. The ally shifts into the blackblade's previous space as a free action.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Goblin
Skills Stealth +10, Thievery +10
Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+1)
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 8 (-1) **Cha** 8 (-1)
Equipment leather armor, short sword

Goblin Underboss (U) **Level 4 Elite Controller (Leader)**
Small natural humanoid (goblin) XP 350

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +8; low-light vision
HP 110; **Bloodied** 55
AC 18; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 16
Speed 5

⨺ **Short Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+9 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage. *Miss:* An adjacent ally makes a free basic attack.

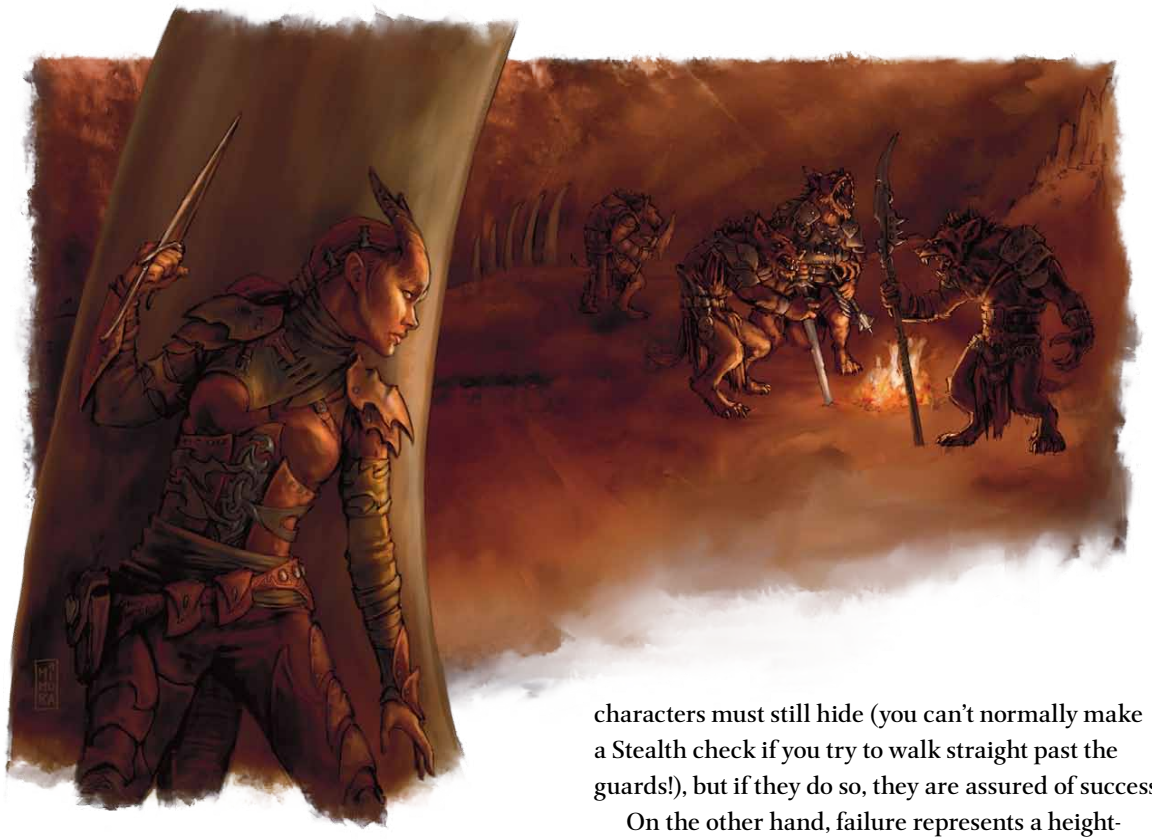
Superior Goblin Tactics (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)
The goblin underboss and up to two allies within its line of sight shift 1 square.

Survival Instinct
The goblin underboss gains a +3 bonus to defenses while bloodied.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Goblin
Skills Stealth +10, Thievery +10
Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 14 (+5) **Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 11 (+2) **Cha** 16 (+5)
Equipment chainmail, short sword

Stealth Challenge

by Mike Mearls
Illustration by Raven Mimura



This month's installment of ruling skill challenges presents a sample skill challenge, one that I've used in my campaigns a few times over the past year. This skill challenge gives the PCs the chance to sneak up on a heavily guarded location such as an isolated tower in an attempt to either sneak in or ambush the defenders.

The setup for this challenge is a little different. It's meant to serve as a flexible template that you can use in any sort of stealth situation. Thus, it gives guidelines for DCs rather than actual numbers. In addition, it organizes actions by their general type or intent rather than by specific skills. For instance, the heroes might try to distract the guards. They could do that in a few different ways, and the distraction entry shows a few options you can either present to the players or use in response to their plans.

Skill Challenge: Ghosts in the Shadows

This skill challenge applies to any situation where the characters want to sneak up on an opponent. The characters might need to slip by a guard patrol, break into a villa, or infiltrate a tower and attack its defenders. The end point is up to you, based on the characters' goal.

This skill challenge uses success and failure to measure the guards' readiness. As the characters gain successes, they distract the guards, entice them to stop paying attention, or remain quiet enough that the guards lose focus. When the PCs have succeeded at the challenge, the heroes automatically succeed on Stealth checks against the guards. At that point, the guards are distracted, confused, or bored to the point that the characters can slip past them. Of course, the characters must still hide (you can't normally make a Stealth check if you try to walk straight past the guards!), but if they do so, they are assured of success.

On the other hand, failure represents a heightened state of alert. Each failure causes more guards to patrol the area, and the guards on hand are more watchful. If the characters fail the challenge, they can't hope to evade the patrols and must find a new plan.

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Setup

Before running this skill challenge, there are a few things you should take care of.

✦ Create your map of the area. A fight might break out if the PCs are caught, and a map is also a handy tool to track where guards are stationed.

✦ Place any creatures, guards, and traps, and think of their schedules. As the heroes creep up on the guard post, be ready to introduce complications. Do patrols walk the area? How often, and where? What is the schedule for guard changes? Do the sentinels report suspicious activity to a commander? Where is that commander? It's easier to improvise in response to the characters' plans if you have all these details worked out.

✦ Think of the guards' escalation plans. Do they call in more sentinels? Do the guard patrols become more numerous and more aggressive in searching the area? Do they arm traps and call in elite watchers, such as guardian monsters or a captain of the watch?

✦ Be ready to sketch a map or diagram for the players based on where you expect them to start. When they make plans, it's easier for everyone if you can show them a map rather than repeating your description. Of course, the map reveals only what they can see!

Your goal at this stage is to include enough detail to give you a good handle on the situation. It's easier to improvise if you have a solid grasp on the guards, NPCs, traps, and other obstacles.

Running the Skill Challenge

When you run this skill challenge, use a map to show the heroes where the guards are stationed, where each character currently stands, and so forth. You can use Dungeon Tiles or a miniatures-scale map, or you can use an overview map that shows a wider area and tracks everything. Positioning is important. After all, if a guard patrol blunders into the spot where the fighter is hiding, then it's likely the skill challenge turns into a fight.

It's easiest to use "rounds" of 1 minute each. Go around the table, asking each player what his character intends to do, and then make skill checks as appropriate. This setup allows the characters to cover a wide area while moving slowly enough to avoid the –5 penalty on Stealth checks for moving too quickly.

Sneaking

Stealth is the party's most obvious option. The characters can sneak using the standard Stealth rules. Any checks they make should be against the guards' passive Perception, using the standard modifiers for Stealth checks. When the characters move around the area, they should make Stealth checks. If a character fails a check, that's 1 failure in the challenge. Regardless of whether one character or every character blows the Stealth check during a round, that's still only 1 failure.

Don't ask for Stealth checks from PCs who don't move.

The heroes cannot gain successes with the Stealth skill. They could sneak past the guards and carry on purely with Stealth checks, but that doesn't alter the guards' current state of alert.

Primary Actions

When the characters try to sneak past or up to the location you've mapped out, they're likely to try a number of tricks. Rather than list each skill, this section breaks down some likely plans and how to handle them. The primary actions all focus on the main goal of the skill challenge—causing the guards to lose focus.

Distraction: A distraction helps the characters in two ways. It diverts the guards' attention while also lulling them into a false sense of security. With each distraction that turns out to be nothing, it's more likely that the guards start to disregard other, minor signs of intruders. After enough false alarms, their resolve starts to waver.

On a successful check, the guards are distracted and eventually frustrated by the character's tricks. On a failed check, the guards realize that someone is trying to trick them. They become more vigilant in response.

Arcana: Combined with the use of a cantrip or similar ability, or with a ritual, a character can create an illusion or other effect to draw away the guards' attention.

Bluff: This skill is a good option for any trick or plan that uses misdirection. A character might try to mimic the voice of a guard to draw a patrol off its path.

Nature: This skill can cover a character's attempts to mimic the sound of a creature or use a thrown rock or a similar trick to trick the guards into looking in the wrong direction. Use this skill for any tricks that a character could accomplish with his knowledge of animals and the wilderness.

Misdirection: While the guards might watch a few obvious paths, the characters can approach via unexpected routes to catch them off guard. If the path through a copse of trees looks like the obvious route, then an acrobatic character can climb to the treetops and make his way through the branches.

A success in this type of check allows a character to find an unobserved route through the area, or at least one that the guards don't bother to watch. Finding the path

allows other characters to use it, possibly at a quicker rate. For instance, the first character to move through the forest canopy must travel slowly and cautiously while locating tree limbs that are sturdy enough to support the weight of other characters who might be larger or more heavily armored. Those other characters can follow his lead without all the extraneous searching. A character who scales a wall can leave a rope behind to make the climb easier for his allies.

On a failed check, the character picks out a path that proves unusable or comes too close to the guards' field of view. A character climbing through the trees might cause branches to sway and creak, drawing their attention.

Acrobatics: This skill is a good match for any routes that require balance, precision, and carefully measured steps.

Athletics: Use Athletics for routes that require climbing, jumping, or raw force rather than careful balance.

Nature: By making a Nature check, a character can spot useful or less-detectable paths through wilderness terrain. A character might notice that a tree that looks too slender to support a character's weight is actually strong enough to do so or that muddy ground has enough solid patches to be traversed. By looking at the flow of water through a nearby stream, a PC may figure out that it's deep enough where it runs past the guard post for characters to submerge themselves and swim by underwater.

Streetwise: The Streetwise skill is Nature's urban equivalent. Use the advice above, but apply it to a city encounter. This skill lets a character spot an unused attic or hidden doorway or tips off the heroes that the guards don't pay attention to beggars in the area. With a quick disguise, the characters can avoid detection.

Reconnaissance: For a final option, the PCs can study the guards and discover flaws in their arrangement. Maybe one guard rarely looks to the right, simply out of habit. On a cold night, the guards cluster around a fire. The fire's light makes it hard for them to see into the dark. Armed with this information, the characters can approach the post with ease.

On a failed check, the hero draws the wrong conclusion: the guard rarely looks to the right because a second, hidden sentinel watches that area; one of the guards by the fire is an elf, whose low-light vision allows him to see into the shadows regardless of nearby light.

Insight and Perception: Both of these skills are useful for resolving these approaches. With a Perception check, a character spots physical flaws in the guards' arrangement. Perhaps the guards are spaced too far apart to watch over the area. An Insight check gives a character information on a guard's disposition or attitude, revealing one watcher as lazy and perhaps even asleep while another is alert and ready.

Secondary Actions

There are a few other actions the characters can take to help them in their task. Some of these apply only in certain types of encounters.

Gathering Information: If the PCs have time to research a castle or other defensive position, they can learn information about the place. History, Streetwise, and Diplomacy can all help uncover useful information on weak points, secret doors, or guard shifts that are notoriously undisciplined.

This sort of check can give the heroes a bonus to their checks. The added knowledge helps in making and executing plans.

Personal Angle: If the characters can interact with the guards before their mission, such as by buying the guards a few drinks at the local tavern, they can set the stage for their infiltration. A PC might pose as a mercenary guard to infiltrate the place, or he could bribe the guard captain to ignore alarms.

Bluff, Insight, and Diplomacy are all useful in this case. This type of check can allow the heroes to ignore a failure. The guard that spots them, having been bribed, ignores them.

Success and Failure

As noted above, once the characters succeed at the skill challenge, they automatically succeed on Stealth checks to hide. However, they must still hide to avoid detection.

During the challenge, each success is a +2 bonus and each failure is a –2 penalty to Stealth checks. In addition, each time the PCs fail, the guards become more active.

First Failure: More guards take watch. The guards form a small, active patrol near the guard post.

Second Failure: The guard's commander is notified of potential trouble. Some or all of the warriors who aren't on duty become alerted and grab weapons. The guards send out another patrol, and both of these patrols sweep areas further from the watch position.

Both of these events require a little planning based on the terrain and the garrison. They're starting points for you to consider. The important thing is that the heroes feel more pressure to move on before the guards find them.

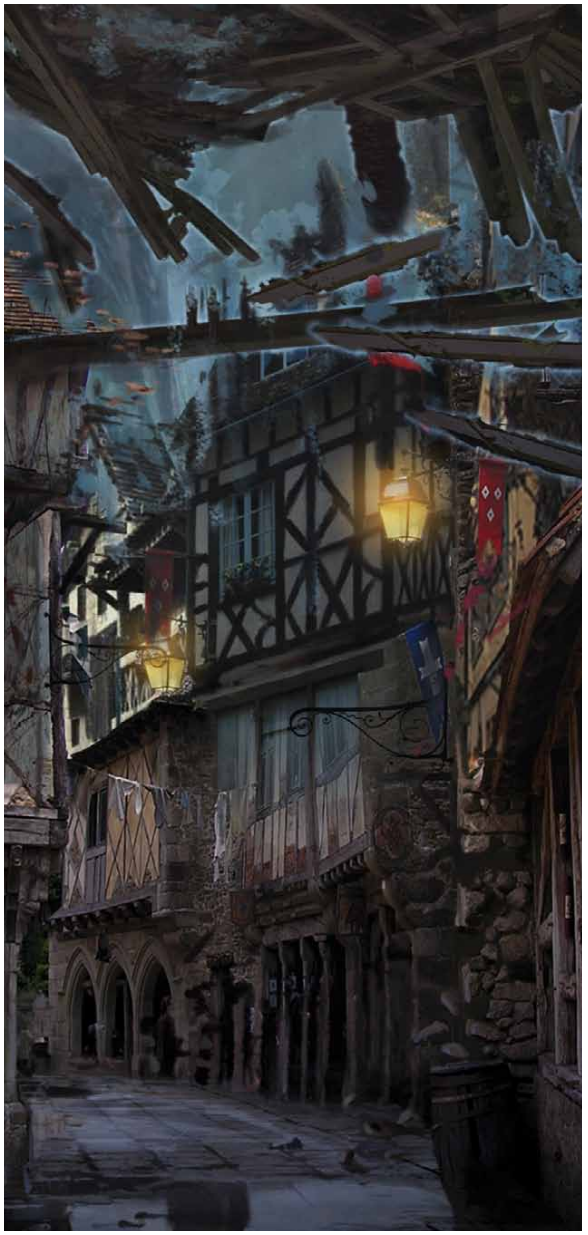
In addition, when the characters run into guards, the challenge might turn into a fight. This is where a map and counters or miniatures are handy. If a fight begins, the PCs might need to turn and run or attack and hope for the best.

About the Author

Mike Mearls is the Lead Designer for the Dungeons & Dragons® roleplaying game. His recent credits include *H1: Keep on the Shadowfell*™ and *Player's Handbook® 2*.

Save My Game
Micromanaging for Fun

BY STEPHEN RADNEY-MACFARLAND
illustration by Rob Alexander



These days, micromanaging has a bad rep ... and for some good reasons. I mean, who wants to be "that guy," the one who is constantly hovering over your shoulder pointing out this or that that you could do better ... or that he thinks you could do better? It's annoying at work, it's aggravating when family and friends do it, and it's just downright infuriating when "that guy" sidles up to you at the game table. You know what I'm talking about. That guy who wants to know why you've waited until 8th level to finally take Implement Expertise, or why you're the one rogue in the entire universe who hasn't taken blinding barrage, or wonders (often aloud) why the heck you would even want a gambler's weapon.

Wow, That Guy's Annoying.

But when you're the DM, you should be that guy. I don't mean mocking your players for their character choices. That's not helpful. What is helpful is taking a look at your player's character choices, understanding both their strengths and limitations, and then designing your game with them in mind.

In past Save My Game columns, I've talked a lot about tailoring your game and its experience toward the players. After all, while your campaign may be your creation, your players are its audience, and you have some responsibility to entertain them. This, of course, does not mean always giving them what they want and making things easy. That's just as poisonous to a Dungeons & Dragons game as making their characters suffer at every turn and never giving them the barest hint of rewards. Entertaining your players is all about the right mix of carrots and sticks – and I mean feeding them just enough carrots after beating them soundly with the sticks. Over time, you'll get to know what your players like and don't like. You'll know when it's the right time to challenge them with a puzzle, when to give them both barrels with a solo that's four levels higher than they are, or devote an entire session to just roleplaying, skill challenges, and political maneuvering. This is the macro entertainment of a campaign; the way that you customize your creation for the characters in the very general sense.

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But we've covered some of that ground before. This month I'm talking about taking some of those principles and applying them to the minutia of the game ... at least where the players and the characters are involved.

EVERY CHOICE IS A WISH

Sigmund Freud believed that every dream was a wish fulfilled in the bizarre language of the dreamscape. I don't pretend to know whether he was right or not, but I do know that just about every line on a character sheet is a wish the player wants fulfilled in play. That tiefling player probably realizes that *infernal wrath* is the beaten mule of racial encounter powers, or that a tiefling fighter is not nearly as easy to optimize as a dragonborn fighter, but I hate to let this particular cat out of the bag – optimization is not the only reason for character choices. There is something about that class and race list that made the player want to play it. It's up to you, the DM, to find out what that is, and make sure that desire manifests into gaming fun.

How do you do this? Start by talking to your player. Ask straight up why they think their character is cool and what they want to do with it. This conversation alone is going to help you determine the player's primary motivation (see *Dungeon Master's Guide* 8) and create interesting story hooks that involve the player's character. But that's only the first step. Next, get to know the mechanics of the character. Ask your players for character sheets, and then updated versions of the character sheet at least once every two levels. Pay special attention to what powers and feats they choose, what skills they are trained in, and how they use them, attempt to use them, or never use them. Consider that in light of the reasons the player gave for wanting to play the character in the first place, and find purchase in the subtleties. Whenever possible, create interesting choices in an encounter where characters can use their powers, feats, and skills to shine.

Some of this is pretty easy. Players who pick feats like Linguist or train in knowledge skills want challenges that let them use their knowledge and show off that they're a polyglot. Some players who pick these feats like the idea that they know more than the other characters and want to play off that fact. In those cases, give special information to just that player and let her relay it (accurately or otherwise) to the rest of the group.

Sometimes this sort of tailoring takes a bit more finesse. That tiefling fighter who takes Lingering Wrath (*Martial Power* 137), Ferocious Rebuke (*Player's Handbook* 195), and powers like *duel strike* (*Martial Power* 7) and *come and get it* (*Player's Handbook* 80) may be inching toward a build that makes him a master of melee control or the mark and target denial trick. They'll likely enjoy combat encounters that allow them to show off and benefit from their tricks and (more importantly for you) also enjoy occasional combat puzzles where their favorite tactic has unexpected consequences. Tight combat spaces, dwarf enemies, or monsters with an immediate reaction that knocks enemies prone when they push the monster (or even drags the pushing creature with them) all create interesting puzzles where the character where the character must either outthink the consequences or create a secondary plan of attack. This kind of challenge works especially well when you present two or more combats with the same or similar combat puzzles. Your players can suffer the effects during the first combat but adjust and outsmart the puzzle in the later encounters.

When playing to a character's choice of powers, feats, and skills, it's always important to let them show off their choices or to challenge them in a fun way. Never, ever find ways to negate their choices even when you find those choices "broken" or annoying. When you do this, players feel as if you are punishing them for being clever – because you are. The DM should challenge and reward players for their choices, never punish them for it. If you don't like a choice, don't allow it in the first place.

LATCHING ONTO WISHES FORGOTTEN

Throughout the history of D&D, there have been those somewhat frustrating, always interesting times when a group of characters struggled through an encounter only to find that the solution to a particular problem was hiding somewhere on their character sheet the entire time (usually at the bottom of a *bag of holding*). "You know, I forgot I had that *chime of opening*" is quickly met with slaps on the head and a mix of grumbles and chuckles. Forgetting that you have a *chime of opening* can be just as interesting as remembering it. Because of this, you should look for ways to make those situations happen.

One staple of D&D, the fantasy genre in general, and video games in particular is to drop an item into an early encounter (usually as treasure) which will

become crucial later on. It's such a staple that doing it too early or too blatantly spoils the surprise. Instead, review the characters' lists of equipment. Don't focus on the weapons, implements, and armor (although you'll want to scan them quickly for oddball properties and powers). Pay attention to the potions, scrolls, and wondrous magic items. Search for unusual items that have fun effects but relatively limited uses. The best items are those that get so little use that the player has probably forgotten about them, such as consumables that were bought three levels ago and never used. Then brainstorm how your players can use them in an encounter — the more interesting or unexpected the use, the better. Never make that item the sole key to solving the encounter's challenge, but find a way to make the encounter easier when and if it's used.

For instance, maybe the rogue has a *rope of climbing* (*Player's Handbook* 255). It comes out every time the players need to traverse a vertical surface and with such effect that you automatically handwave most encounters that call for an Athletics check for climbing. Now imagine an encounter where the characters need to retrieve an object that lies 80 feet down a narrow and dangerous crawlspace. Sure, the rogue can squeeze in, suffering all sorts of damage along the way unless she is able to disable all the lightning and thunder traps that line the tiny crawlspace. Couldn't a crafty player figure out that the *rope of climbing* can wind its way down the space, tie itself around the object, and be yanked back? The rope might take some damage (maybe even enough to destroy it; wink, wink, nudge, nudge), but given the right circumstances, that's 100 times better than the rogue getting battered and zotted.

This tactic works especially well when it comes to rituals. After a string of particularly challenging and fun combat encounters, it is easy for characters to forget they have a seldom-used ritual. One of the funniest sessions I've seen was watching a bunch of characters struggling with ideas to traverse a dangerous-looking underground lake. After making a rickety raft from lashed stalks of giant mushrooms and a hard-fought battle against kuo-toa in the middle of the lake, the wizard remembered he had Water Walk in his spellbook. That wizard has not repeated that particular mistake again! In just about every challenge, the first thing he does is look through his ritual book for possible solutions.

MAKE SOME LISTS, CHECK THEM TWICE

Aside from my notebook where I keep hard copies of my players' character sheets and power cards (mostly from D&D Character Builder, but I do have a couple of players who don't use the program), I also make a number of little cheat sheets.

Some of these cheat sheets take the form of sticky notes listing powers, magic items, rituals, and feats that the players don't use much but that I think might be interesting to latch onto when designing encounters. There are also notes reminding me when a character has a lower-than-expected magic item in a particular slot, which serves as a reminder for me to replace it or give the opportunity to replace it soon. If for some reason I can't or don't want to replace something, I know that I should err on the side of lower-level monsters and brutes in my monster mixes for a while. This lowball adjustment to monster mix is also helpful when some players opt not to take some of what I call "combat number maintenance feats" — feats like Implement Expertise, Weapon Expertise, and Paragon Defenses.

The opposite is also true. One of my groups is obsessed with accuracy buffs and damage boosts. They've tricked them out to such an extreme that I often increase the number of soldiers and higher-level monsters in encounters I design for them. The funny thing is that some of those players seem to think they are "winning D&D" by choosing accuracy and damage feats. In reality, all they are really doing is making me design more difficult encounters. Silly players!

One of my most important cheat sheets is my high/low list. On it I have the highs and lows for accuracy, defenses, and skills among the party. It helps me with narration — for example, knowing that the wizard can succeed automatically on a particular knowledge check by taking 10 lets me just tell him the information while setting up the encounter, without calling for a die roll. It also helps me fine-tune skill challenge DCs, monster mixes, and the generals of monster targeting — for example, the party's controller has lots of "vs. Will" attacks, and knowing that makes me aware that the dim-witted dragonborn fighter will be especially vulnerable. Like the adjustments I make for feat and magic item mixes, such knowledge informs my decisions about softballing or pulling my punches, and allows me to do so while still rolling my dice in the open so it's not immediately obvious to the players.

In the end, having a good micromanaging grasp on your PCs' abilities and weaknesses will help you

create better adventures and encounters to challenge and delight your group. Don't feel like you need to memorize those characters (that's an impossible task for most of us), but take a few minutes before the game to scan the character sheet for inconstancies, strengths, weakness, interesting magic items, utility powers, and rituals that are lying dormant. Find a way to use that knowledge for the betterment of your adventure and campaign design. You'll find that a little goes a long way, and you'll create more combats and challenges that seem tailor made for the group – because they are.

Last month, I mentioned that I've started a Save My Game group on the Wizards Community for folks to submit questions and be part of the Save My Game conversation. The response has been great! Thank you to all who have joined and especially those of you who asked questions and shared advice on the group's forum. Next month, as an early holiday gift, I want to run an entire column of brain-busting questions from DMs out there. I've already picked up a few questions from last month's DM Hotline and the Save My Game group, but I need more. Join the community, pose your hardest questions, and I'll pick some of the best for next month's column! I look forward to chatting with you online!

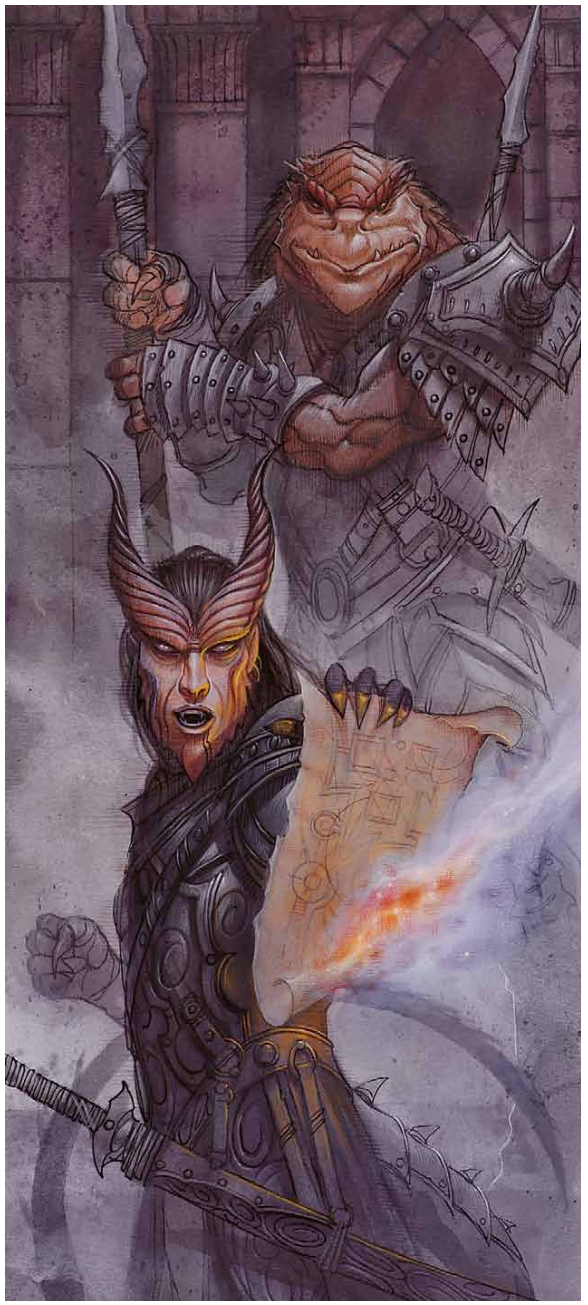
About the Author

Born on a stormy Christmas day, in our nation's capital, during the Nixon administration, the stars were definitely wrong when **Stephen Radney-MacFarland** came screaming into the world. Spending most of his impressionable years as a vagabond and ne'r-do-well, Stephen eventually settled in the Northwest to waste his life on roleplaying games.

Once that RPGA guy, Stephen is now a developer in RPG R&D where he doesn't create the traps... he just makes them deadlier. He also teaches a class on roleplaying design for the Art Institute of Seattle, molding the minds of young and upcoming designers. Be afraid. Be very afraid.

The D&D World

BY JAMES WYATT
illustration by Wayne England



I've been thinking a lot recently about quest design and how designing quests can help you define a campaign, a world, or a character in interesting ways.

I've been thinking a lot recently about quest design and how designing quests can help you define a campaign, a world, or a character in interesting ways.

Partly as a result of that thinking, you'll see what I think is an interesting feature in the *Player's Handbook Races: Dragonborn* book coming out in January. This book is a slim 32-pages solidly focused on material for players with dragonborn characters, but it includes two-and-a-half pages of quests you might adopt for your character, broken up by tier. If your background defines where your character came from, your quests define where you think you're going, and that's a part of the character that players should have a say in.

There's my first note for Greenbrier this month, then: I'm going to ask my players to define one quest for their characters, which I'll then try to work into the ongoing campaign.

Beyond that, I've spent some time exploring the quest design in World of Warcraft to see if there's something to be learned there. It's pretty easy to mock a lot of the quests in that game, and I certainly have no interest in sending my D&D players on quests to collect spleens or hooves from random wild animals. But there are some interesting elements to quest design that might be useful for me in fleshing out my campaign further.

A lot of quest chains read a bit like a scavenger hunt: go here and collect this herb, take the potion to so-and-so in this other place, then go there to find a magic stone, go collect five handfuls of some other substance over there, then kill this beast to retrieve this other thing. Those would probably be pretty boring in D&D, unless ...

One of the principles I outlined when I was thinking about *The Gates of Firestorm Peak* as a superadventure was "multiple quests and expeditions," meaning that characters should have multiple reasons to enter the dungeon multiple times. A similar principle can be applied to any region of your campaign world, even if it's just "multiple quests."

It's often the case in WoW that you might have several different, unrelated quests all leading you to the same geographical area. The end result is that while you're there looking for the magic stone you might also be looking for a dryad as part of another quest

and hoping to find a clue to the location of a special artifact at the same time.

Imagine four quest chains, each with five steps (perhaps each step is a minor quest). And you have ten locations you want the characters to visit.

The first quest chain might look like this: Visit locations 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9, in that order, retrieving some item or talking to some NPC or looking for some information in each location.

The second quest chain might look like this: Visit locations 1, 4, 6, 7, and 10, in that order.

The third quest chain might involve visiting locations 2, 3, 6, 8, and 10. And the fourth could be locations 2, 4, 5, 8, and 9.

That means when they're at location 1, they're thinking about the first and second quest chains. When they move on to location 2, they're thinking about the third and fourth quest chains. At location 3, they're on the first and third quest chains. At location 4, it's the second and fourth chains. And so on.

There might also be quests unrelated to these three quest chains that the characters can pursue in these same locations, so they're thinking about as many as three different quests in each spot.

Of course, it's probably the case that the characters don't know every step of the quest chain when they begin. There are two models for a chain like that. One possibility is that the characters return to a central home base and talk to the quest-givers after visiting each location. (They might be able to do two locations in a row before returning home, like locations 1 and 2, for example.) As an alternative, each quest can offer clues pointing to the next location. It's probably interesting if some of the quest chains are of each kind, but that's worth playing around with.

This is all pretty abstract. It looks interesting on my spreadsheet, but what might it look like in my Greenbrier campaign?

Greenbrier Chasm: The Second Foray

My campaign arc has a second foray into Greenbrier Chasm topping off the heroic tier around levels 9–11. I've imagined the characters fighting foulspawn and a mind flayer boss and beginning to deal with the organizations from *Lords of Madness*. There could also be a grell nest (from Night Below) and possibly rockseer elves to point to the Elder Elves. This gives me some solid components I can assemble into this kind of quest structure.

So let's imagine three quest chains, each connected to one of the Lords of Madness organizations that I want to use: the Circle of the True, the Society of the Sanctified Mind, and the Topaz Order. I'll need quest-giving NPCs from each order, preferably close at hand or with some easy way to communicate with the PCs (I don't want the PCs to have to run back to Silverymoon after every delve into the chasm). And I'll tie a fourth quest chain to the Keepers.

I'll invent ten interconnected locations within the chasm, each equivalent to something like a three-encounter dungeon delve or maybe a little more. But some of them aren't combat locations, or at least they incorporate opportunities for roleplaying, negotiation or pure exploration. So far, I've been pretty fast and loose with locations in the chasm, just sending the PCs where they needed to go. I'll map out these locations and their relationship to each other, because the players will need to be able to visualize them.

- *Foulspawn temple:* I imagine this location as a mind-wrenching monolith focusing alien energy from the Far Realm.
- *Grell nest:* Borrowed from *Night Below*.
- *Rockseer outpost:* A small outpost of these deep-dwelling elves, mutated by Far Realm energies and adapted to life underground.
- *Troglodyte warrens:* Here's a good population for the neogi to raid for slaves (see below). I'll probably apply a theme to these trogs to make them feel a little more like aberrant monsters.
- *Neogi slaver pod:* A prison warren where neogi slavers gather captives from elsewhere in the chasm before taking them deeper underground.
- *Crystalvein Cavern:* A cool, enormous cavern where veins of crystal flow through the rock walls. I envision this as a place where the characters will go in order to find a special mineral of some sort, rather than just to fight something.
- *Tomb spider lair:* A straightforward nest for this nasty monster.
- *Ancient tomb:* A crypt with a skull lord and some other undead foes, probably the location of some ancient relic the characters need to find.
- *Dragon's lair:* For right now, I'm thinking it's an adult purple dragon who holds some secret, perhaps a bit of prophecy the characters will seek out.
- *Mind flayer's palace:* Another alien place, the seat of the mind flayer's power.

I generated those ten locations primarily by looking at the monsters that inhabit the level 9–11 range. As I flesh out each one, I'll want to be sure to make each location distinct, interesting, and wondrous, so it's not defined solely by the monsters inhabiting it. I put them roughly in the order that I'd like the

characters to visit them, so I'll want to arrange them geographically so that order makes sense.

Now for the quest chains!

Circle of the True

The Circle of the True is a primal-oriented group that seeks to preserve nature against the threat of aberrations from the Far Realm. They have ties to fey and the Feywild, and they also incorporate ancient orcish traditions comparable to the Gatekeepers of Eberron. (The quest-giver for the Circle of the True might even be an old orc druid from Tower Watch!) Jeremy's druid, Etholas, is the most likely character to form an attachment to the Circle of the True.

The quest for the Circle of the True goes something like this: A member of the Circle has detected strange stirrings in the Chasm and through extensive divination has learned that a nest of grells has unearthed some ancient Gatekeeper magic and is manipulating it. They might be reopening an ancient sealed portal or tampering with forces that once helped keep the Speaker in Dreams bound, repurposing them to more sinister ends. The Circle member asks the characters to investigate the grell nest and stop whatever they're up to.

In the grell nest, the characters meet a scout from the rockseer elves, who have their own traditions descended from the Gatekeepers. The elf helps them against the grells, then accompanies them back to the Rockseer outpost, where they engage in a skill challenge to convince the Gatekeeper leaders there of their good intentions and knowledge of similar traditions.

The Rockseer shaman then sends them to find the lost Crystalvein Cavern and use the magic flowing through it to trace other disruptions in the primal energies of the chasm. There they learn of two key nexus points in the energy lines: one in the ancient tomb and one in the mind flayer's palace. The last two steps in the quest chain involve visiting those nexus points and a) stopping whatever disruption of the energies is being perpetrated by the denizens of those places, and b) performing some ritual to restore the proper flow of energy through the nexus points.

Society of the Sanctified Mind

The Society of the Sanctified Mind is a scholarly society devoted to Ioun, a great resource for knowledge about aberrations and the Far Realm, and the primary custodian (among humanoids at least) of information about the prophecy. The society also has a particular interest in bringing psionic power to bear against the aberrant menace. I can imagine a player character with ties to the society having a sending stone he can use to communicate with a scholar in Silverymoon, so he can check back in with his quest-giver without ever leaving the chasm. Since Oskar (Mike's hybrid cleric/ranger) is devoted to Ioun and has a hunger for knowledge, I expect him to develop these ties eventually.

So the quest chain might look something like this: The society believes that there's a particular shrine in the complex that once housed the Speaker in Dreams and which contains important information about the prophecy. It sends the characters to that shrine, which is now crawling with foulspawn who have made it their own twisted temple. The characters venture to the temple, find the information they're looking for, and report back to their contact in the society.

As he studies that prophetic information, he discovers mention of a tribe of elves driven underground and asks the characters to seek out these mysterious elves. When the characters find the Rockseers, the elves ask them to prove their intentions by retrieving some of their number who were captured by neogi slavers. That done, the characters learn what they need to from the Rockseers and report back to their contact in the society.

His next mission for them sends them to an ancient tomb now haunted by a tomb spider, where they retrieve another important piece of the prophetic puzzle. That prophecy points to an artifact of some kind which, the characters learn, is now in the hoard of a purple dragon. Through violence or diplomacy, the characters must retrieve that artifact from the dragon.

Topaz Order

The Topaz Order is a holy order of knights dedicated to protecting the civilized races from aberrant monsters. Uldane, Bill's halfling paladin, owns a holy sword that once belonged to a knight of this order, so I expect him to have the most significant ties to the Topaz Order.

The quest chain for the Topaz Order is almost all about fighting evil aberrations: The order has discovered that there's a so-called "temple" occupied by foulspawn in the depths of the chasm and asks the characters to purge it from the world.

At some point while the characters are in the chasm, a band of troglodytes emerges from the chasm and raids the village. The Topaz Order asks the characters (as if they need any further incentive) to go find the troglodytes and repay that attack in kind.

Even the Topaz Order isn't all about killing evil monsters, though. Their next quest is to visit Crystalvein Cavern and retrieve a fragment of crystal

– rich yellow crystal which looks very much like topaz, in fact – to be used in the creation of a special holy symbol or perhaps to improve the sword Uldane already possesses.

In Crystalvein Cavern, the characters are attacked by web-shrouded mummies and (I trust) decide to track them back to the lair of the tomb spider that created them.

Finally, the Topaz Order sends the characters to defeat the presumed mastermind of Greenbrier Chasm, the mind flayer in its palace.

Keepers

The Keepers are the descendants of the ancient order sworn to prevent the Speaker in Dreams from escaping its imprisonment beneath Greenbrier Chasm. They now seek a way to return it to its prison or destroy it for good. Keepers view the threat of the Speaker in Dreams as their responsibility, not a matter for the rest of the world – including the adventurers, except the one character who might be a secret member of this order. That makes this quest chain interesting: I think the quests might be a secret to everyone but the Keeper character. I can easily hide the XP rewards for completing these quests by folding them in with monster XP. And I really like the idea that as the characters are visiting these locations for other reasons, one character has a secret agenda in mind. It might also be completely self-motivated – the character doesn't necessarily have a contact among the Keepers giving him these quests, but he knows what must be done. (I wonder if Chris Perkins would be amenable to being the secret Keeper. I suspect he might ... especially if he's reading this.)

So at each of five locations within the chasm – the grell nest, the troglodyte warrens, the neogi pod, the ancient tomb, and the dragon's lair – the Keeper character is looking for something or doing something to help restore the magic of the ancient prison. That might even be something that will eventually draw the Speaker in Dreams back to the chasm. I like the idea that these quests are focused on the locations themselves rather than anything in them (creatures or objects), that it's all about working on the magic of the prison. I'm not going to get more specific than that at this point.

What It Looks Like

With those quest chains laid out, how does it actually work in play?

- The characters start out with four quests, collected from various contacts:
- Stop the grell from manipulating the magic of the chasm (Circle of the True);
- Find prophecy information in the ancient shrine/foulspawn temple (Society of the Sanctified Mind);
- Purge the foulspawn temple (Topaz Order);
- Secretly work some magic in the grell nest (Keepers).

It doesn't matter whether the characters go to the grell nest or the foulspawn temple first, but let's assume they start at the foulspawn temple, since they have two quests that everyone knows about pointing in that direction.

Once they've purged the temple and retrieved the prophetic information from it, they get instructions to look for the Rockseer elves. With no clear leads on how to find them, the characters might as well go to the grell nest next. There they meet the Rockseer scout and return with him to the outpost. They must complete the skill challenge and also free captured elves from the neogi. At the neogi pod, the Keeper character has his secret business to attend to.

The troglodyte raid presumably happens around this time, so the characters will have their retribution mission (and the secret Keeper mission) to do in the trog warrens.

Both the Rockseers and the Topaz Order want them to go to Crystalvein Cavern next. There they see the two nexus points, but before seeking them out, they're attacked by the tomb spider's brood. Conveniently, the Society of the Sanctified Mind also has an interest in the tomb spider's lair.

The characters now know the three remaining places they have to go: the ancient tomb (one of the nexus points for the Circle of the True as well as a spot of interest to the Keepers), the mind flayer's palace (the other nexus point and a villain the Topaz Order wants them to vanquish), and the dragon's lair (where there's an artifact they need for the Society of the Sanctified Mind as well as Keeper work to be done). They can visit those spots in any order, and that will wrap up these four quest chains.

If each location is about a three-encounter delve, I'm looking at 30 encounters, which is plenty to cover the three levels of play outlined in my campaign arc. Thanks to all this brainstorming about quests, it looks like I'm well on my way to filling out my campaign planning!

About the Author

James Wyatt is the D&D® Design Manager for Wizards of the Coast Roleplaying R&D. He was one of the lead designers for 4th Edition D&D and the primary author of the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide®*. He was one of the designers of the *Eberron® Campaign Setting* and is the author of several *Eberron* novels.

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

Ed Greenwood's Eye on the Realms

by Ed Greenwood

illustration by Christopher Burdett

Amreth Gaunt, Master Merchant

The east-west overland trade routes of the Heartlands spawn profitable, hard-bitten caravan companies and a certain breed of wily, worldly wise, independent traders.

The most successful style themselves master merchants, and make and lose fortunes several times over until their perilous careers bring them to untimely ends—or until they gain wisdom enough to retire.

Scornubel is the traditional haven of those sought as criminals elsewhere, even though the wealthy ends of the trade routes—Waterdeep, Amn, and Sembia—are the easiest places into which one can disappear. Independent traders travel, sometimes swiftly, and on short notice; those who don't rarely amass real wealth. Still, a wise merchant who protects himself well and controls the supply of greatly desired goods in a frontier town for a long enough time can become comfortable.

Of course, with rising success comes elevation into the ranks of tempting targets, too. Bodyguards, allies, and precautions are a must.

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A Mysterious Man

One of the busiest of the currently active master merchants is one Amreth Gaunt; he is in no hurry to disappear anywhere.

This sardonic, weathered, yet still agile man was born somewhere in the Heartlands, and his origins can best be described as mysterious. Gaunt claims not to remember where he was reared—or by whom—other than that it involved "lots of warehouses, and scurrying around in their lofts like a rat, fetching and carrying." He gives the impression that he has spent all his five decades or so in shops or mercantile trading work.

He has in the past gone by several other names, now in disuse for various reasons; these include Halmond Beskurk, Marrathur Sheldzun, and Ilmur Drethtul.

Amreth Gaunt **Level 6 Elite Skirmisher (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 500

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +11
HP 136; **Bloodied** 68
AC 21; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18; +2 to all defenses against opportunity attacks
Speed 6

Short Sword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 damage.

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 2d4 + 5 damage.

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 5/10; +11 vs. AC; 2d4 + 5 damage.

Fencing Strikes (standard; at will) ✦ **Weapon**
Gaunt makes a short sword attack and a dagger attack (melee or ranged), and he shifts 1 square after each attack.

Surprise Counter (immediate interrupt, when hit or missed by a melee attack; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
Gaunt can shift 1 square before the attack; he gains combat advantage against the target (included in attack and damage); targets the triggering attacker; +13 vs. AC; 3d6 + 4 damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of Gaunt's next turn.

Muddling Slash (standard; requires short sword; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 damage, and the target is slowed and grants combat advantage (save ends both), and it slides 2 squares.

Blinding Bomb (minor 1/round; requires blinding bomb; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Area burst 1 within 10; +8 vs. Fortitude; the target treats all nonadjacent squares as lightly obscured until the end of Gaunt's next turn. This attack doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.

Ignoble Escape (move; encounter)
Gaunt ends any marked condition currently affecting him, and he shifts 6 squares.

Combat Advantage
Gaunt deals 2d6 extra damage when he hits a creature he has combat advantage against.

Quick Draw
Gaunt can draw an item as part of the same action required to use that item.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Chondathan, Common, Dwarven, Elven, Goblin
Skills Bluff +10, Diplomacy +10, Endurance +9, History +10, Insight +11, Thievery +12
Str 15 (+5) **Dex** 19 (+7) **Wis** 17 (+6)
Con 12 (+4) **Int** 15 (+5) **Cha** 15 (+5)
Equipment leather armor, short sword, dagger, 3 blinding bombs

Character and Lifestyle

Gaunt has a glib tongue and swift, sly wits, though in public dealings he tries not to appear sly. No one would call him dashingly handsome, though he might well have been, thirty summers ago; nor would anyone think he was nobly born (though he knows how Cormyr's nobility, the lords of Waterdeep, and the merchant princes of Sembia talk, and knows their current fashions, attitudes, and interests). What Gaunt lacks in looks and acting skills, he makes up for in shrewdness and general knowledge. Among other fragments of knowledge, he knows herbs and knots, and—after a good look—which wagons in a sale row are the sturdiest.

Although he'll deal with anyone, Gaunt avoids eladrin because he considers himself out of his depth when it comes to their customs, tastes, and preferences. He has developed a deeply rooted dislike for the arrogance, coupled with cruelty and gross incompetence, of many Amnian families who "have been too rich for too long."

Gaunt trusts his staff more than his business contacts: that is to say, he trusts no one at all. Nor does he trust himself. In case he falls under the influence of spells, mind flayers, or "something else that can mess with one's mind," Gaunt hides caches of notes written to himself, spare keys, and emergency coinage. As a result of distrust, Gaunt has never taken a wife. He uses herbal concoctions he learned from an old, now-dead Wychlaran to avoid fathering children when he hires bedmates or visits an increasing number of old friends among the aging female merchants of Waterdeep, Suzail, and Selgaunt.

Essentially a loner, Gaunt collects nothing but information and wealth, and he indulges in no hobbies except anticipating mercantile trends and fishing to fill his belly when rainy weather stalls his wagons in mud. He used to collect maps, and now has no need to: he invested in a Sembian map-copying business. Gaunt peered often enough at the wares he transported to shops all across the Heartlands that he has memorized them all. Consequently, whenever he's in Saerloon on other business, Gaunt can drop into Haskur's Marvelous Maps, on a side street there,

and draw detailed corrections and updates to maps for the cartographers who work in part for him.

Gaunt lives simply and can readily, without distaste, rough it when the need arises. Idle days make him restless, while exploring populated places with trading possibilities (but not wilder lands), is meat and drink to him. On rare occasions, he indulges in exotic liqueurs and strong cheeses, although not excessively, and in silken-soft sheets in a palatial rented bedchamber.

His sole affectations are well-made boots; elbow-length soft leather gloves; and stylish, high-collared, ankle-length weathercloaks that can keep off the rain. Fastened to the underside of the seats in wagons Gaunt rides in, hidden in the seat lining, are a few masks he can use to conceal his face at long range or in poor light. They are of supple leather, painted skillfully—like the masks worn onstage by actors in the best theaters of the Heartlands—in permanent subtle cosmetics that can make Gaunt seem young, pock-marked and hideous, ill with an unspecified wasting disease, handsome, ancient and wrinkled, or feminine.

Gaunt in Combat

Gaunt is an adventurer in the same manner that every wayfaring merchant or peddler must be. He is never an adventurer for hire. Though his fencing skills are impressive, he prefers to throw enemies into disarray so he can escape—and he has seen enough to correctly anticipate unfolding trouble or likely ambushes. To help him successfully flee pursuers when on the road, he's likely to carry prepared tricks, such as alchemical items not listed in his statistics (see *Adventurer's Vault* for options). He has become an expert at quickly flinging such items.

What Gaunt Can Do for You

Thanks to his busy been-everywhere-and-dealt-in-everything past, Gaunt is the sort of merchant who knows shopkeepers and wagon masters, and just where across the Heartlands to procure specific goods: this sort of cheese or that weight and finished length of chain . Want a broken sword fixed in Iriaebor? Want to know where you can get a fresh rose of a particular hue, cheap? Want to know a haughtier, though higher priced, alternate source? Gaunt can tell you, for a silver piece.

If asked about shadier goods, Gaunt insists—stoutly, if need be—that he doesn't know where one can obtain them and doesn't want to. This is falsehood, plain and simple; Gaunt knows sources for buying and selling drugs, rulers' regalia, and other contraband. Nor does Gaunt deal in slaves, kidnappings, bodyguards, or skilled laborers procured through bribery or blackmail. He maintains that he has no need to deal in those kinds of commodities, and thereby court disaster. He is successful in sticking to honest, popular, useful goods. This last is true; he has won much coin through honest-goods dealings. Gaunt avoids illicit trade because he knows full well that master merchants who don't, or who turn a blind eye to it, are soon either caught by authorities or framed by shadier dealers. Gaunt prefers to make modest, unrecorded fees by helping these back-alley merchants indirectly, selling them wagons, crates, or cover cargoes, or by providing distractions or just standing aside when they are in dire haste.

Gaunt has trusties, a staff of loyal errand-runners, packers, and delivery persons, of both genders and most civilized races, all of whom are street-smart and better armed than they appear at first glance. Either Gaunt or one of his trusties can deliver that rose, cheese, or chain to you for 3 sp plus the going item price, or one of them can guide you to the source to do your own haggling, for 2 sp.

Those Trusties

Gaunt's trusties are likely to be younger and possibly more dangerous in a fight than their employer—and they are constantly learning street smarts. They also habitually take precautions, traveling in pairs and having a third or fourth trusty tailing a visible agent. As a result, they are hard to dupe. They know how to handle inspectors, tax collectors, and city guards.

Many can pull off successful deceptions, posing as outlander pilgrims or appearing to be of greater wealth or higher breeding than their true status, for instance. They've been firmly trained to report back to Gaunt or fellows frequently; if a trusty or a cargo goes missing, Gaunt knows in a hurry, not the next day.

Current Pursuits

These last few seasons, Gaunt has dealt increasingly in thorthen, because demand and, therefore, prices are rising, and because the thorthen suffer less spoilage and loss in shipping than the cheeses and the pickled-in-oils fowl that he formerly dealt in. Thorthen, cultivated in northern Sembia, have thick mauve skins and boast savory, orange-fleshed marrows that taste like roast turkey flesh. Also known as meat melons, they are fast becoming a staple food of commoners..

Master merchants rarely specialize exclusively in any one good, and Gaunt is no exception. His current wares include buckles, toggles, clip latches, replacement sheaths and scabbards, small cast-metal bowls with lids, thorthen, and medicinal wines. Gaunt's numerous current investments include dozens of small sundry wares shops in Saerloon, Selgaunt, Daerlun, Suzail, Iriaebor, and the poorer neighborhoods of Athkatla, Crimmor, and Waterdeep.

Amreth Gaunt can usually be found on the road in the Heartlands, tirelessly wheeling and dealing and sniffing out new opportunities for profit.

Adventure Hooks

Gaunt is always watching for new trends, goods shortages, and swindles. Misleading adventurers with false treasure tales and misdirection, to bring them into conflict with brigands and troublesome monsters, is easy money and wise business.

The Black Fist: For years, Gaunt has been seeking the Black Fist, a man-sized, enchanted obsidian sculpture of an upright clenched left human hand. This sculpture was briefly an important part of Westgate's defenses due to its ability to fire battle-spells long distances when aimed and activated; however, it was stolen and hidden west of Cormyr, in the wild Heartlands. Now rumors have led Gaunt to discover the whereabouts of the cavern that holds it—which is also home to a beholder colony. Gaunt uses a story of lost treasure to lure PCs to the cavern to battle the eye tyrants for him. Unknown to him, the beholders are seeking human adventurers to capture and enslave, to be their agents out in the wider world. The Black Fist is a polymorphed beholder whose eyestalk powers are increased in range by other enchantments laid upon the item. Because a belief has arisen among them that it leads them to gain greater powers, the beholders revere the Fist and are trying to free the beholder so that it can return to its true form.

Too Much Cheese: By spreading rumors and duping several merchants into shipping cheeses to the same place, Gaunt engineers an oversupply of cheese in a city. The plan is for his agents there to buy, inexpensively, a lot of the largest wheels of cheese—not for resale, but in which, once hollowed out, to hide and smuggle out of the city rulers' regalia and other readily identifiable contraband. Of course, someone who can't be traced back to Gaunt must guard the outbound loaded cheeses. So Gaunt hires two layers of mouthpieces to engage the PCs on his behalf, as guards. However, a guarded load of cheese proves just too suspicious for the local authorities. They descend on the PC guards—those PCs who accepted Gaunt's offer of employment—and, as the authorities are hot on their heels, the guards dump the cheeses into the laps of the PCs who refused Gaunt's offer.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and even romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is still happiest churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. There are still a few rooms in his house with space left to pile up papers in . . .